

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 35

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June 2002

The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

- **encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental Region and
their conservation**
- **liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional societies**
- **collate and publish
material on
Oriental birds**

Two bulletins and a journal,
Forktail, are published annually.

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The Oriental Bird Club is a Registered
Charity No: 297242

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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

OBC Email Address

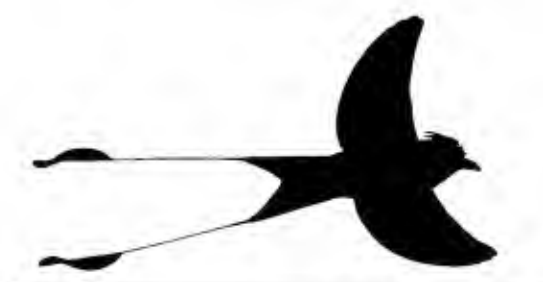
mail@orientalbirdclub.org

OBC Web Site

<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>

Cover photo:

Mongolian Ground-jay *Podoces hendersoni* by Henry Mix



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Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

In this issue, in place of the Chairman's Letter, we reproduce the Statement of Aims for OBC's 'Smythies Fund', as approved by the membership at the 2001 AGM. It is important that every member of the Club should have easy access to this declaration.

Oriental Bird Club Bertram Smythies Memorial Fund Statement of Aims

The clauses below set out broad guidelines for the use of the Bertram Smythies legacy. The terms of the bequest placed no restrictions, and offered no guidance, on the use of the funds. Having taken suggestions from the membership, OBC Council (the Executive Committee of Trustees of the Oriental Bird Club) has agreed the following Statement of Aims.

- The legacy shall be used to create the OBC Bertram Smythies Memorial Fund (hereafter the "Smythies Fund").
- The Smythies Fund shall be used in furtherance of the charitable objectives of the Oriental Bird Club (hereafter "the Club"). It will not be restricted entirely to any single charitable objective or geographical area within the Oriental region. However:
- The preferred purpose to which the funds will be directed are conservation or conservation awareness projects.
- The Club will proactively develop projects, either in conjunction with grant applicants (both individuals and non-governmental conservation organisations) or independently, before inviting applications to conduct the project.
- The Asian Red Data Book ("*Threatened Birds of Asia*") will be used as a guide in prioritising conservation projects.
- It is anticipated that each project will be significant in terms of the amount of funding required and the time and effort OBC Council and other Club members will invest in the project. For this reason it is anticipated that only one or two projects will be actively pursued at a time.
- Whilst conservation-based projects will form the focus for Smythies Fund activities it is anticipated that other projects, in furtherance of the Club's other charitable objectives, will be undertaken from time to time. Two areas that Council anticipates will lead to projects are:
 - (a) Publication of material on Oriental birds – where a discrete project arises or a body of materials is made available the Smythies Fund will facilitate its publication when this may have been impossible from the Club's other resources (for example in the normal annual edition of *Forktail*). This may give rise to an additional special edition of *Forktail* or a separate publication such as the OBC Checklist. The preference will be for a discrete edition or publication that can be identified as a Smythies Fund project.
 - (b) Funding of local non-governmental conservation organisations (NGOs) that are non-profit making in nature. The Club may proactively develop projects that can best be funded via an NGO (e.g. a purchase of land). Alternatively, the NGO itself may be supported in pursuit of the Club's conservation priorities or other charitable objectives. However, the Smythies Fund will not invite or entertain general appeals for funds from NGOs.
- The Club will use the Smythies Fund for the initial launch of a project and in order to sustain a project through to successful conclusion. However, it is anticipated that supplementary fund-raising will take place in support of each project. Indeed the project may form the centrepiece of the Club's fund-raising activities for that year. In this way the

Smythies Fund will be 'topped up' and its life span extended.

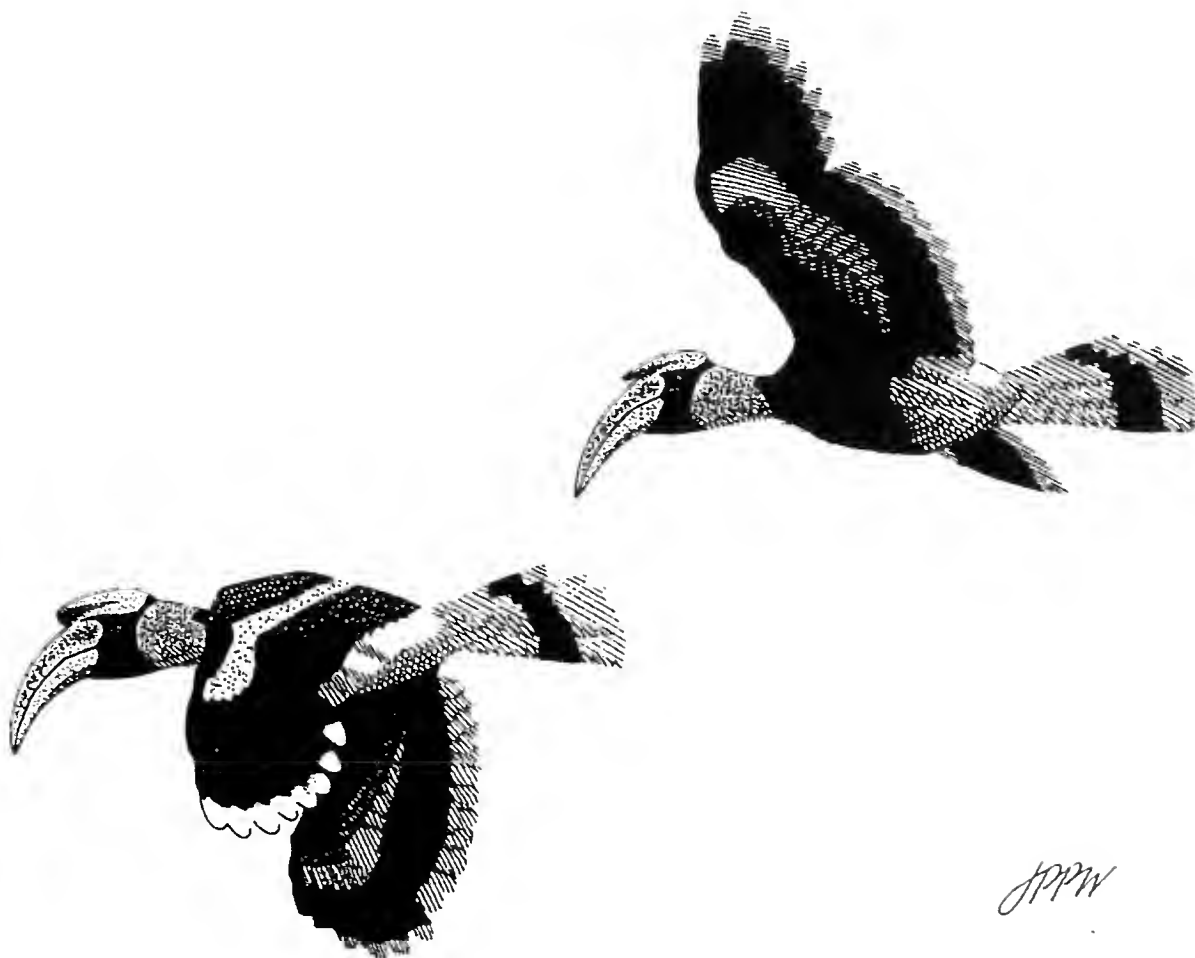
- Where supplementary fund-raising takes place in support of a project, a separate fund (either a designated unrestricted fund or a restricted fund, depending on the nature of the fund-raising) will be set up for the project and the funds raised ring-fenced until the conclusion of the project. Subsequent to the conclusion of the project, which OBC Council will determine, the balance of the fund will be returned to the Smythies Fund.
- No individual project shall expend more than 25% of the balance of the Smythies Fund at the time the project is launched.
- OBC Council will select Smythies Fund projects. Each project will be allocated to a Council member to act as project representative. It is likely that a project committee will be formed of OBC Council members and other Club members to support and progress each project. This committee will report periodically to OBC Council. The Conservation Committee, although not

responsible for running Smythies-based projects, will form an important pool of expertise to draw upon and will advise on various conservation aspects of the project, as will the OBC's Country Representatives.

- The Club's successful programme of conservation grants will continue in parallel to the Smythies Fund. It is anticipated that the OBC Conservation Fund will continue to be funded from its current sources – i.e. Mega Prize Draw, Corporate Sponsors and individual member donations. However, it is recognised that exceptional circumstances may arise in the future when it is appropriate to fund individual small grants via a transfer from the Smythies Fund (e.g. the funding of an initial survey before launching a full-scale project).

This document was approved by OBC Council on 30th June 2001 and by the membership of the Club at the Annual General Meeting held on 1st December 2001.

Enclosed with this bulletin is a copy of the revised constitution of the Club, again as approved by the membership at the 2001 AGM.



Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* by Jan Wilczur

Club News

incorporating the Gurney's Pitta Campaign update



Reports of recent Club meetings and events:

OBC 17th Annual General Meeting, Saturday 1st December 2001

The members and friends present welcomed the return of the AGM to the Zoological Gardens meeting rooms. Sadly it seems that the meeting is losing its appeal as the last three years have seen a stabilisation if not yet a decline in the numbers attending the meeting despite varied and well presented programmes. Those present enjoyed a talk by Barry Wright and Jon Hornbuckle on 'Weird and Wonderful Wallacea', an account of a visit from which they had just returned, Dibhu Prakash gave an excellent presentation on 'The Decline of Vultures in India', Dr Stuart Marsden gave an interesting and challenging paper on 'Habitat Change and Oriental Birds', and the programme was rounded off by Pete Davidson with his talk on a little visited country 'Birding in Cambodia'.

On the conservation front, Marcus Kohler announced the annual Forktail-Leica and OBC-WildWings awards and this was followed by an update on the Gurney's Pitta campaign by Brian Sykes.

Two major items of business occupied the members attending the AGM; approval of the revised constitution and approval of the Bertram Smythies Memorial Fund 'Statement of Aims' document. Graeme Spinks led the discussion on the constitution and Steve Rowland introduced the 'Statement of Aims'. Both documents were approved unanimously. All members will find one copy of the revised constitution enclosed with this Bulletin.

The final highlight of the meeting was the presentation of a cheque from WildSounds '£2001 for 2001' to Chairman Nigel Collar by Duncan Macdonald. The cheque, destined for the conservation fund, is made up of various sponsorships and the commission from the OBC book service. Please continue to use the OBC Book Service in 2002!

Dutch Birding Meeting, Utrecht, Saturday 9th February 2002.

The meeting was a lively affair, very well attended by bird watchers from all parts of the country. The

speakers were a very international group including Per Alström, Tony McGeehan and Ian Wallace as well as OBC's Krys Kazmierczak and Brian Sykes. Brian gave a short talk on the Club and the Gurney's Pitta campaign before handing over to Krys whose talk on bird watching in Goa was very well received. A small OBC stand, looked after Margaret Sykes ably assisted by Krys' partner Sandra did a good trade in sales items and several new members were enrolled. A very enjoyable weekend ended with some excellent bird watching on the Sunday. Thanks to Dutch Birding for inviting the Club to attend again, and in particular their president Gijsbert van der Bent for making all the excellent arrangements.

OBC Meetings and Events during 2002: British Bird Watching Fair, August 2002

The 2002 British Bird Watching Fair will be held between 16th and 18th August at Rutland Water. The 2002 event is particularly important to the Club as the main fund raising target is in aid of Sumatran lowland rainforest. Council decided to find a project to support under the overall umbrella of the Sumatran rain forest theme. WCS – Indonesia Programme is seeking funding for a project to 'Evaluate the Status and Threats to Hornbills across the southern Sumatra Landscape'. OBC will fund raise for this project during the Fair and Council has set an ambitious target of £5000. We hope that all members will help by selling as many prize draw tickets as possible! Publicity Officer Steve Rowland is working closely with the fair organisers to ensure that the Club once again has a high profile during the event. The Club will organise the second showing of the quiz show 'Call My Ruff', Richard Thomas is representing the Club in 'Bird Brain of Britain', several talks will be given on behalf of the Club and a number of other ideas are under consideration. As usual Council is looking for volunteers during the event to help on the Club stand, sell draw tickets etc. Please will anyone able to help for half a day (or longer) contact the Secretary.

The Conservation Cup, sponsored by WildSounds for the second year, will again provide Saturday evening entertainment,

although once again lack of eastern talent suggests that the chances of an OBC win are remote. Please contact Marcus Kohler via the Club if you feel yours is an overlooked talent.

Cley Meeting, Sunday August 25th 2002

The late summer meeting on August 25th will again be held at Cley Village Hall. As always the meeting is free to all comers. The doors will open at 11am. An evening BBQ will round off the day for the third year running and we anticipate that the traditional lunchtime curries will be available. In addition to a varied range of talks, there will be a last opportunity to purchase draw tickets, and the winners will be drawn during the afternoon, after the last talk. It would be a great help to have a few volunteers to assist with set up and food preparation from about 9am. Would anyone prepared to help, please contact the Club in one of the usual ways.

Annual General Meeting, London, Saturday November 30th 2002

The 18th OBC Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday November 30th at the Zoological Gardens meeting rooms. Please make a note of the date now. It's a good time for the family to do some Christmas shopping, so why not make a family day of it? Council hopes to welcome more members and friends to this year's event.

Preliminary Notice - Bharatpur Centenary.

The world famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park located at Bharatpur celebrates its 100th birthday during 2002. The Wildlife Department of Rajasthan is planning a celebration of this milestone. Originally this was planned for the weekend of December 14th to 16th 2002. Recently a sponsor has come forward with funding for a new visitor centre for the park. Not surprisingly it is planned to open this during the event, but this may now lead to postponement until 2003. OBC had been discussing with the organisers how the Club might participate in the celebrations and it was hoped to have an OBC stand and an OBC 'day' with talks on various topics including the conservation work of the Club in India. It is still hoped that the Club will be represented at the event. Further information will be published on the Club Website and [OrientalBirding] as soon as a final decision on the timetable is known. If any members are interested in visiting Bharatpur at the time of the celebrations, please will they contact the Secretary, preferably by E-mail. Full information will then be sent to them.

Announcements:

Changes on OBC Council

Duncan Macdonald stood down at the AGM, although his close association with the Club will continue and WildSounds will continue to operate the OBC book service. Tim Allwood (Bulletin Editor) and Simon Colenutt (Assistant Bulletin Editor) were elected to Council at the AGM. Early in 2002 Marcus Kohler found that the pressures of business and the demands of family life meant that he could no longer devote enough time to the demanding role of Conservation Officer. Council accepted Marcus' decision to stand down immediately with great regret and only on condition that he continued to find time to organise the 'Conservation Cup' on behalf of the Club for the BBWF! Phil Benstead, newly returned from his 'world tour of Asia' has agreed to take over and his previous experience on both the Conservation Committee and Council will prove invaluable. Phil has been co-opted to Council for 2002.

Changes to *Forktail* Editorial team

The *Forktail* editorial team has been strengthened in recognition of the growing workload. Eleven years after taking over from Nigel Collar, Tim Inskipp has relinquished the helm although not his association with *Forktail*. Stuart Butchart has joined the team as Senior Editor, David Blakesley continues as Managing Editor and Tim continues to serve on the team as Consulting Editor. Nigel Collar is assuming responsibility for 'short notes'. On behalf of all members of the Club, Council would like to take this opportunity to thank Tim for steering *Forktail* through its development for so many years.

***Forktail* 18**

Forktail 18 is scheduled for publication in August 2002 and will be printed in time for the 2002 Bird Fair. Please will all members visiting the Fair pick up their copy at the Club stand.

The *Forktail* Number 1-5

The Club is still trying to obtain copies of *Forktail* 1-5 (see Bulletin 33, p.4). Please contact the Secretary if you can help.

OBC Prize Draw 2002.

The Draw continues to be the corner-stone of the annual conservation fund raising effort. Proceeds from the 2002 draw will go towards the Sumatran Hornbill study project (see BBWF notes) that OBC is hoping to fund. In 2002 the main prize is again

a Leica APO-Televid 77 Telescope, valued at about £1000. WildSounds have donated the second prize, a voucher for tapes/CDs value £200 and the third prize, *Birds of the World (Vol 7)*, has been donated by publishers Lynx Edicions. There is the usual extensive and varied selection of books as runner up prizes.

A book of ten draw tickets (tickets are priced at £1.00) is included with this Bulletin for Club members with a UK postal address. The draw is not restricted to UK members and any member living outside the UK may send payment (GBP £1.00 for each ticket) by GBP cheque or credit card (Mastercard or Visa) to OBC – Prize Draw,

P.O.Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, U.K. Tickets will be made out in your name and included in the draw which takes place at the OBC Cley meeting on August 25th. Tickets will also be on sale at the BBWF and at the Cley meeting. Ticket stubs and remittances returned by mail should be posted in time to arrive at the Club post box not later than Friday 9th August.

Additional books of tickets may be obtained from the Club at the above address. Please will members make a big effort to sell tickets to friends and workmates.

Gift Aid Declarations — a thank you!

Thanks to the members paying tax in the U.K who signed Gift Aid Declarations in favour of the Club, a cheque for £2,229.90 was received from the U.K. tax authorities for the year ending April 5th 2001, the first year of operation. This significant boost to the Club's income will help delay the time when an increase in subscriptions will be required. It is never too late to join in the scheme, please contact the Treasurer to get a form.

New Corporate Members for 2002.

In Bulletin 34, Club News carried a feature on the role of OBC Corporate Members. Council is pleased to announce the following new Corporate Members for 2002: Delair Travels (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka, Flamingo Tours & Travels, Germany, High Elms Travel (Pvt) Ltd., Sri Lanka.

OBC Corporate Sponsors.

The OBC Corporate Sponsorship scheme was launched in late 1991. The scheme basically allows donors of significant funds (normally £500 or more) to use the Club's Forktail logo on promotional literature etc. Corporate Sponsors are listed on the inside front cover of the Bulletin. Over the years whilst many sponsors have continued to make donations to the Club, a

number of them have not, but no formal approach has been made to either extend or terminate the relationship. Led by Promotions Officer Mike Edgecombe, Council has now commenced a review of the scheme. Organisations who have not made donations for several years have been contacted with a view to renewing their sponsorship. In the meantime they have not been listed in this Bulletin. We look forward to welcoming them back to the scheme in the very near future. We are of course very interested to hear from members who may have some influence in their companies when it comes to charitable donations. If you may be able to help, please contact Mike Edgecombe at <mail@orientalbirdclub>

Future OBC Tours?

With the 2002 OBC tour to Tibet overbooked, now is the time to let us know if any of you are interested in a repeat tour in 2003 or even if you have any suggestions for out of the way destinations for future possible tours.

Please contact Mike Edgecombe via <mail@orientalbirdclub>

Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

General and political

A number of people have suggested that updates on the campaign and the position in Thailand should be provided more often. Information is posted on the Club Website and on [OrientalBirding] from time to time and in the event of a far-reaching development occurring requiring urgent action, communication will be as universal, swift and clear as possible. Council appreciates the on-going interest and concern of members and friends. This interest helps to sustain the campaign. It is also appreciated that at times when nothing appears to be happening, a certain feeling of frustration amongst supporters at the lack of hard information is both likely and difficult to avoid.

In fact major developments are relatively few in number and often quite confusing and slow moving at the outset. This is frustrating for those of us directly involved too! A good example is the following sequence of events that is just unfolding. Recently the Thai government moved to replace the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) Director-General, this would appear at first to be a significant turn of events. However, this was followed very quickly by an announcement that an appeal had been made on his behalf to HM the King of Thailand by some hundreds of

'persons unknown' to have him re-instated. This left the Thai government 60 days in which to resolve the situation. At the time of writing no further announcement has been reported.

At about the same time it was announced that the RFD was being re-structured and that 'protected areas' (presumably including all National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries) would be moved under the jurisdiction of a new ministry of 'Natural Resources and the Environment'. Some disturbing 'noises' have been heard from the direction of the new ministry but their significance is not yet clear. The re-organisation will obviously take some time which will be an excuse for further lack of action.

In another recent development, the long awaited infamous Thai 'land bill' went through the final stages of approval. This has been a matter of great concern as the rural community was hopeful that title to large areas of 'protected lands' would be in their grasp. During the very last stages of the passage of the bill through the Senate, an amendment was passed placing 'protected land' outside the provisions of the bill. This appears to be bad news for the rural community, and good news for protected areas.

In both cases, 'the devil may be in the detail' that is yet to be revealed and quite possibly yet to be formulated. At this moment in time it is unclear whether the National Reserve Forest (NRF), which is a critical part of the remaining lowland forest habitat in the Khao Nor Chuchi area is regarded as 'protected' in the above scenarios or not. This decision is of course likely to be critical.

All the events reported above are typical of the way in which Thailand is being governed today, the results of Thai internal political activity and there is little any foreign NGO can do to influence the internal working of Thai politics. Experience has shown that it is better to allow a little time for something more definite to emerge after a series of announcements and formulate strategy when things become a little clearer.

Fund Raising

Two people require special thanks in this report. OBC Australian member Ken Cross held a charity dinner in a local Thai restaurant. This created a lot of interest and raised £195 for the fund. Thank you very much Ken! This is an idea which could be used elsewhere. If anyone else is prepared to try it, Ken is prepared to pass on information and Council can provide supporting display material.

As many people are already aware, Chris Gooddie is a glutton for punishment and did it all again. He improved his time in the 2002

London Marathon and raised over £3,000. An excellent response from non birdwatchers and birdwatchers alike, justifying Chris's faith that his supporters would also deliver again! It's not too late to make a donation; thanks to all those who did and especially to Chris who once again has made it all possible.

Developments at site

Dry weather throughout the December to March period initially caused our worst fears to be realised when encroachment and cutting of forest restarted. The renewed activity was partly the result of the expectation that the land bill mentioned above would make it easier to obtain title to land already cleared. In February a meeting was held at the WLS HQ to discuss the setting up of the planned ranger/warden training programme. All the interested parties including the Border Patrol Police(BDP), OBC and Wildlife Conservation Thailand Programme, were present and one outcome was a good discussion of current problems. As a result, patrolling of the area by the Border Patrol Police commenced in March and April. This resulted in the arrest of several people and the encroachment was curtailed. The benefit of co-operation between BPP and RFD was immediately demonstrated if only briefly. The objective now is to achieve more permanent co-operation following on from the training exercise. According to local reports, the planned closure or partial closure of trails in the WLS was still to go ahead from April 30th.

During April, the long awaited replacement of the Wildlife Sanctuary Superintendent took place, at the same time preparations were in hand for a possible visit by HM the Queen. Whilst a royal visit is good for the prestige of the WLS, it is the occasion for further construction work, puts all other activity on hold (including the plans for the training programme!), and all for an event which at the time of going to press has not taken place.

Thanks to OBC member and BBC TV journalist Adrian Pitches, a short documentary was made at site during April and broadcast on April 30th/May 1st on BBC North East 'Look North' and then soon afterwards on BBC World Service. Some interest was aroused locally and one offer of help has been received – a better return than from any previous publicity.

Just as we go to press, we have heard that the long planned RFD Ranger/Warden Training Programme will be going ahead at the Wildlife Sanctuary HQ starting on May 22nd. A total of 35 staff from the WLS and Krabi Province RFD unit

will attend the eight-day course. A wide range of skills will be taught by a variety of experts during the course designed and organised by WCS Thailand Programme in conjunction with the OBC. The OBC is providing a large proportion of the financial support (GBP £5000) with help from the South Bangkok Rotary Club – the latter thanks to the enthusiasm of OBC member Alec Napier.

The success of the Marathon sponsorship will help replenish the coffers and allow the Club to press on with other initiatives in the Gurney's Pitta campaign.

The birds themselves appear to be in good shape and trails B and U have been fruitful areas for visitors where two pairs or more have been seen well.

The campaign goes on in good heart, but some trepidation, thanks to the political developments outlined above.

Miscellaneous

Launch of [OrientalBirdingpix]

Krys Kazmierczak and his colleagues have just launched [OrientalBirdingpix] a sister E-mail discussion group to [OrientalBirding] for those interested in posting, viewing and discussing photographs of birds found in the Region. It basically operates in the same way as [OB], sign up via the OBC Website.

The Club has a new mail address

Members are reminded that all correspondence should be sent to:

Oriental Bird Club
P.O.Box 324
Bedford
MK42 0WG
U.K.

Mail for other organisations

Despite the request printed in Bulletin 33, some members continue to enclose items addressed to other UK organisations, notably their renewal forms for other regional bird clubs, with correspondence for the OBC. This rather selfish, lazy behaviour makes extra work for the volunteers who run the clubs and increases costs. The enclosures are also delayed in reaching the final destination. As explained before, all the UK based regional clubs rely on volunteer workers and none of them has a permanent office. Council requests that members send only material intended for the OBC to the Club address. Thank you for your co-operation.

Eurocheques

European members are reminded that the Club cannot accept Eurocheques as the means of payment for membership subscriptions or purchases due to the high cross border bank charges within the EU.

Payment by GIRO direct to GIRO account 35 234 1904, adding £2.00 to cover GIRO charges is an alternative method of payment.

Stop Press – OBC Sales

No OBC Sales leaflet is enclosed with this Bulletin. It has been delayed until September and will be despatched with *Forktail* 18. We anticipate that a new T-shirt design and a new pin badge design will be ready for sale at the BBWF and details will be given in the leaflet.



Conservation Fund

Compiled by Phil Benstead with contributions from Mark Gurney, Geoff Hilton and Carol Inskipp

It is all change here on the Conservation Committee with Marcus Kohler standing down as Conservation Officer after five years and myself, Phil Benstead, picking up the reins. This report is a little slimmer than normal due to the change-over but normal service will be resumed soon. We are pleased to announce that OBC has awarded six grants for projects in China, India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. We are also able to report back on projects from India, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

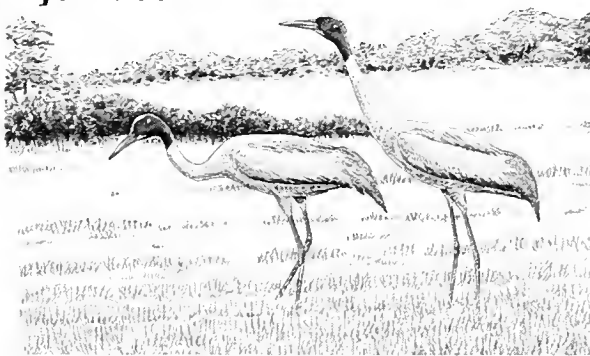
Thanks once again to all who support the conservation activities of the club by attending meetings and purchasing OBC goods.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Survey of the wintering waterfowl of Mengjin Huanghe Nature Reserve, Henan, China

A small grant has been awarded to Wen Zhanqiang to conduct a survey of one of the most important wetlands in central China, where the large concentrations of wintering waterbirds include globally threatened species such as Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*. These wetlands are increasing in extent as a result of a recent water conservation project, and are expected to become even more important for waterbirds and the local economy. In addition to studying the birds, the project will investigate current threats to the wetland birds and the effectiveness of on-going conservation measures, with the aim of making recommendations for improved protection within the reserve.

Sarus Crane in Rakhine, Myanmar



Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* by Craig Robson

Tin New Latt has been awarded a small grant to study Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* in the Ayeyarwady Delta in Myanmar. Sarus Crane is a globally Vulnerable species, and it has declined in Myanmar to the extent that it was thought to be only a vagrant to the country. However, a breeding population still exists, and Latt's study will try to assess the population size, breeding habitat, and seasonal movements of the cranes in the Ayeyarwady Delta. A survey of this species in Myanmar was recommended in the Asian Red Data Book and Latt's work will provide valuable information from this little-known area.

Survey and status of Himalayan Quail in India



LEICA

The Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa* is a Holy Grail of ornithology: there have been no confirmed sightings for over a century, yet many experts believe that it is not extinct, and awaits re-discovery. The 2002 Forktail-Leica Award has been given to a project that seeks to make the precious breakthrough and relocate the bird. If the team – led by Rajiv Kalsi – are successful, they will undoubtedly find a bird that is in desperate need of rapid conservation measures. Therefore this project is of unique

importance and the Oriental Bird Club is proud to be associated with it.

Dr Kalsi and his team will use a variety of methods to try to relocate the species in Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh in northern India. The methods closely follow the target actions suggested in '*Threatened Birds of the World*', which lists the species as Critical. Initially, requests for information will be made in the species' potential range, through posters, newspaper articles and media interviews. Local hunters and forest department workers will also be interviewed. Finally, experienced researchers will be accompanied by trained dogs in a series of detailed ground searches in the putative habitats of the species. These are montane grasslands adjoining deciduous forests at altitudes of c.1,600–2,400 m a.s.l.

We wish the project team every success, and eagerly await the results of their search.

Conservation Education for Elementary Schools around the region of the Bali Barat National Park



Maman Surahman has been awarded the 2001 OBC-Wildwings award to undertake a conservation awareness programme in the villages surrounding the Bali Barat National Park on Bali, Indonesia. This National Park is the last outpost of the beleaguered Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi* – the wild population of which is thought to be down to just six birds. The five-year project specifically aims to connect with the young generation, especially elementary school students and hopes to increase the knowledge of students in relation to the habitat and requirements of the Bali Myna. Additional aims include: teaching students to participate in the conservation of the National Park; increasing the role of the National Park as a site of education for the local community and the education of the adult population surrounding the National Park of the importance of conserving its ecosystem and its resources.

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Study of Spot-billed Pelican in Puttalam District, Sri Lanka

This year a Sri Lankan team (Kanchana Weerakoon Ranasinghe, Chandralal Kumara and Harsha Athukorala) will undertake a three-month preliminary study of the globally Threatened Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* in Puttalam District, North Western province, Sri Lanka. Spot-billed Pelican is a regular breeding resident in the lowlands of Sri Lanka and is locally common in the dry zone. There are records of the species from Puttalam but no systematic study has been carried out so far. According to the Asian Red Data Book it is under threat due to habitat loss including cutting of mangroves, disturbance at its breeding sites, and excessive fishing and hunting. This pilot study aims to identify the pelican's habitats in the District, to find out more about the threats the birds face and to raise local peoples' awareness of this important species and its habitats. This pilot survey will form the primary step for a long-term project on the pelican.

Studies of Endangered Galliformes in the Neora Valley National Park, West Bengal, India



Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelana*
by Craig Robson

The Neora Valley National Park is probably the last pristine wildlife refuge in the Darjeeling Himalaya. Although small at 88 km², its extensive altitudinal range covers many habitats, from subtropical forest through coniferous and mixed temperate forests, to alpine scrub. It is potentially a very important area for numerous birds of conservation concern, as well as much other endangered wildlife. Dipankar Ghose of the World Pheasant Association's South Asia Office has been awarded an OBC small grant to investigate the status of threatened Galliformes in the park, as well as assessing the status of the other avifauna, and the threats to the Park.

The key Galliform species are likely to include Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*, Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelana* and Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*, all of which were recorded during a brief survey in 1995, as well as Grey Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*, for which there are historical records.

Due to its inaccessibility, very little information is available on the flora and fauna of the Park. This project is to be conducted in active collaboration with the State Forest Department, and the faunal inventory that will be produced will go a long way in helping the West Bengal government to formulate appropriate conservation strategies for this area. The area is also being proposed as one of BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas (IBAs), and the information gathered will be very valuable for the Indian IBA programme.

Consumption of wild galliformes by human populations residing close to important wildlife areas in the western Himalaya: A survey.

Wild game forms an important source of protein to locals living close to rich wildlife habitats in the Western Himalaya. Prohibition of such hunting is clearly unenforceable in terrain as difficult as the Himalaya. A new approach to achieving sustainable exploitation of the game resource has recently been adopted in India: two new categories of protected area, based on community conservation, have been developed. In this project, managed by Rahul Kaul of the World Pheasant Association's South Asia Office, an investigation will be made of how handing conservation to the community has changed its outlook towards conservation. It will go on to examine how this has been translated into changes in the status of game species.

The project will compare use of the gamebird resource in forests controlled by the State Forest Department with that in community controlled forests. Sites will be matched for galliform abundance and socio-cultural conditions. Information on the nature of, and extent and reasons for, hunting will be collected through interviews with local people. Abundance indices for gamebird species will be generated using call counts and trail monitoring.

CONSERVATION FUND REPORTS OF GRANT-ASSISTED WORK

Report from small grants in India

Samraat Pawar and Aysegul Birand of the Nature Conservation Foundation in Mysore, India have completed an unprecedented survey of birds, reptiles and amphibians in nine protected areas in north-eastern India.

A survey of amphibians, reptiles and birds in north-east India



Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* by Jan Wilczur

North-east India forms part of the Indo-Myanmar biodiversity hotspot, and contains two Endemic Bird Areas. Despite having relatively low (for India) population density, forest destruction outside the protected areas has been substantial, and forests now cover only one third of the region.

The survey concentrated on the low–mid altitude moist forests (100–1,500 m a.s.l.), which are the most biodiverse and the most threatened. The authors emphasise that lack of information about the distribution of species in the region is a considerable stumbling block to conservation efforts, and their survey went part way to rectifying this. They conducted foot surveys over an eight month period, as well as reviewing the literature, talking to local people, and gathering detailed information on the habitat and land-use. They were particularly concerned to investigate congruence and complementarity between the three main taxa surveyed: reptiles, amphibians and frogs. They aimed to determine whether any one taxon acted as an effective indicator of species richness and distribution patterns among the others.

In total, 265 bird species were recorded during the fieldwork, representing 89% of the forest bird species recorded in the region – a remarkably high proportion in just nine areas. Several globally Threatened, Near-threatened, restricted range and poorly known species were recorded, including White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, and Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* (see Table 1). The results for the other taxa were even more impressive: six species of amphibians that were new to science were discovered! Perhaps surprisingly, there was rather little congruence between the different taxa. Bird species richness tended to show a positive relationship with rainfall, and a negative relationship with habitat fragmentation. These results lead the authors to suggest that more

Table 1: bird species of global concern recorded during the survey

Species	Global Status	Sites where recorded
Lesser Adjutant <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	Vulnerable	Nameri
White-winged Duck <i>Cairina scutulata</i>	Endangered	Nameri
Pallas's Sea Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>	Vulnerable	Nameri
White-cheeked partridge <i>Arborophila atrogularis</i>	Near-threatened	Ngengpui, Namdapha
Blyth's Kingfisher <i>Alcedo hercules</i>	Near-threatened	Namdapha
Great Hornbill <i>Buceros bicornis</i>	Near-threatened	Nameri, Pakhui, Namdapha, Dampa, Balphakram, Barail, Ngengpui,
Brown Hornbill <i>Anorrhinus tickelli</i>	Near-threatened	Barail, Namdapha
Rufous-necked Hornbill <i>Aceros nipalensis</i>	Vulnerable	Namdapha
Beautiful Nuthatch <i>Sitta formosa</i>	Vulnerable	Mouling
Yellow-vented Warbler <i>Phylloscopus cantator</i>	Restricted Range	Nameri, Pakhui, Namdapha, Balphakram, Barail
White-naped Yuhina <i>Yuhina bakeri</i>	Restricted Range	Mouling
Beautiful Sibia <i>Heterophasia pulchella</i>	Restricted Range	Mouling



White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri* by Dan Cole

biodiversity surveying is needed and that such surveys should aim to sample a wide range of taxa.

Most of the sites (which are all protected areas of one type or another) appear to have a relatively good conservation status although the protected areas are increasingly becoming islands in a landscape strongly affected by human activities.

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Straw-headed Bulbul in Singapore

Report from small grants in Singapore

Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* is a globally Vulnerable species threatened by trapping and habitat destruction. Formerly widespread in the Sundaic region, it is now extinct in Myanmar, Thailand and Java and is in danger of extinction in Sumatra and Kalimantan. The species still occurs in Singapore but the population is small, and was thought to consist of about 30 birds.

This study, funded by an OBC Small Grant, aimed to provide a baseline estimate of the Straw-headed Bulbul population in Singapore; to identify the key habitats for the species; and to recommend strategies for its conservation. The bulbul was surveyed in 91 one kilometre squares between May and July 2001, and details of the habitats in the squares were recorded.

The results suggest that the Singapore population is between 76 and 93 individuals – considerably higher than the previous population estimate – and that they are found mainly in the less developed northern, western and central regions of Singapore. The habitats used by the bulbuls are mainly secondary forest, former cultivation, mangrove, freshwater marshes and parkland, or a combination of types. These habitats have been fragmented during the last 30 years, leaving small remnants where the bulbuls survive.

The existing and potential threats affecting the habitats of Straw-headed Bulbul are: poaching, military related activities, road building or widening, illegal dumping, quarrying, development encroaching on the edge of forests, drainage works, intrusion of exotic/introduced species, pollutants, and other human disturbances such as unauthorised collection of fruit and plants at the sites.

It is imperative that effort should be made to increase the population through better habitat protection and improved legislation. A series of strategies was proposed to manage the Bulbul's conservation at site, national, and international levels. These included reducing disturbance, setting up nature reserve networks, an improved land-use planning framework, and incorporating the bulbul's conservation in the national Green Plan.

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Report from small grants in Sri Lanka

Study of Spot-winged Thrush in Sri Lanka



Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* by C.M. Isherwood

An OBC small grant of £500 part-funded this project and enabled it to continue. Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* is one of two thrushes that are endemic to Sri Lanka. It is fairly common and mainly occurs in the island's wet zone forests although scattered populations are also found in the dry zone. As forest on the island has suffered rapid degradation and fragmentation in recent decades, it was classified as Near-threatened in the recent Asian Red Data Book.

Data were collected on 45 field days between July and October 2000 in a 25 ha area of Suriyakanda forest, which is part of Sinharaja National Park in south-west Sri Lanka. The habitat and level of disturbance were mapped. A total of 62 hours was spent mist-netting and two birds were trapped and marked with coloured plastic bands. Ecological data i.e. tree species and physical data, such as humidity, temperature and light intensity were measured using a thermometer and luxometer. The slope and altitude of the area were also measured.

The Suriyakanda forest is highly diverse and has a thick canopy cover of 85%. Vegetation height is 35–40 m. Four Spot-winged Thrush territories were identified within 3 ha of the study area. All were more or less 0.5 ha in size. These were the areas where the territorial pairs spent approximately 90% of their time.

Apart from the early mornings and late evenings the Spot-winged Thrush was found to be silent, although on a few occasions we heard them singing in the middle of the day. They spent much of their time foraging on the ground for small invertebrates, such as earthworms and moths, as well as the occasional spider and grasshopper, and also berries, which become the main food item during the fruiting season. When disturbed they preferred to stay still for a few minutes rather than attempt to fly away immediately. It also likes to scratch the soil on rocks although we were not sure what it fed on here. There were no obvious threats to the species but dogs, people and vehicles may cause disturbance.

As the study area was close to a Buddhist monastery there were many people who were coming from remote areas to offer alms to Buddhist priests. We were able to have informal discussions with these visitors and the local community about the importance of the forest and biodiversity of the area and were also able to discuss the Spot-winged Thrush and the importance of protecting it. The Buddhist monks showed a great deal of enthusiasm for this bird as well as for other species.

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Recent ornithological observations in Ma Da Forest, Dong Nai Province, Southern Vietnam

Ma Da Forest is situated in the south of Vietnam, 80 km to the northwest of Ho Chi Minh City (see Fig. 1 below) and was once part of the continuous lowland tropical forest of southern Vietnam and Cambodia. Now, due to cutting and chemical warfare Ma Da represents an isolated island of tropical semi-deciduous dipterocarp forest.¹ The climate of Ma Da is markedly seasonal, the dry period lasting from October until May; the annual precipitation slightly exceeds 2000 mm.²

Among the numerous works on the avifauna of southern Vietnam³ there are several dedicated to the birds of Ma Da forest.^{2,4,5,6,7,8} These have mostly been carried out by ornithologists of the joint Russian-Vietnamese Tropica Center.⁹ Work carried out in 1997 characterised the composition and ecology (biotopic preferences and trophic links) of the avifauna of the Ma Da forest.² Authors, working primarily on one sample area of the Ma Da forest, have reported 163 species of arboreal birds including the first records for southern Vietnam of Ratchet-tailed Treepie *Temnurus temnurus*, Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*, Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*, Hainan Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis hainanus* and Tiger Shrike *Lanius tigrinus*.

Unfortunately, there has been continuous logging of valuable trees (*Dipterocarpus*, *Shorea*, *Buahanania*, and *Sindora*) that has continued after the termination of studies in 1997. Thus, the scope of our recent ornithological observations in Ma Da was to check the arboreal avifauna of Ma Da forest and establish whether human activities had resulted in any changes.

During studies carried out from 10–26 April 2001 and 4–10 May 2001 we observed 89 species of bird, of which four had not been previously recorded from this area. These were Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*, Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica*, Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata* and Fork-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga christinae*. Thus the list of birds recorded in Ma Da forest can be expanded to 167 species. Some bird species were not recorded during the study due to the limited amount of time and seasonal restriction. Nevertheless, some preliminary assumptions can still be made.

Previous authors have commented on the 13 species strictly confined to the closed canopy forest.⁷ Of these, we observed only Red-headed Trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus*, Banded Kingfisher *Lacedo pulchella* and Scaly-crowned Babbler *Malacopteron cinereum*. This suggests that the process of closed forest degradation due to logging decreases the number of stenotopic species confined to such an area.

The selective cutting of large trees also reduced a number of large hole-nesting species such as hornbills. We did not observe Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, which was considered by our predecessors to be a fairly common species of the area, whereas Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* was recorded frequently. The latter is smaller and does not require nest

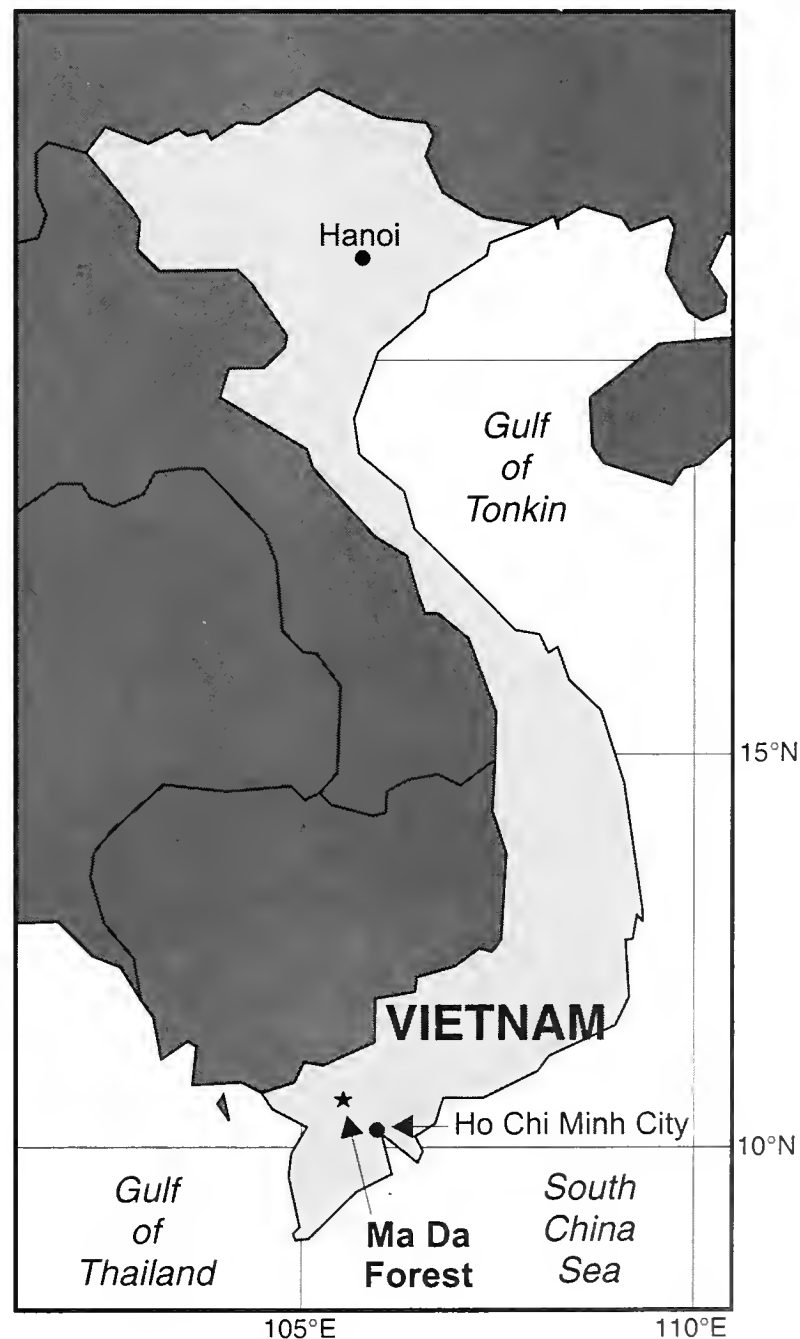


Figure 1. Map showing location of Ma Da Forest, Vietnam

holes in as large a tree as the former. For the same reason, we did not observe White-bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis* and met Great Slaty Woodpecker *Mulleripicus pulverulentus* just once, whereas smaller species of woodpecker were quite abundant. Species found in the canopy layers and edges of the primary forest² were well represented, supporting the hypothesis that they have a high immunity to forest fragmentation.

Although the list of birds recorded in Ma Da forest has been expanded to 167 species, it is not certain that some of the previously recorded species still inhabit the area. The most vulnerable to selective logging are those found under the closed canopy and/or making their nests in large trees. Species initially confined to the canopy layers of the primary forest and forest edges are highly resistant to fragmentation of the forest.

Acknowledgements

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Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* in Haryana, India

Three different Stoliczka's Bushchats were discovered in south-eastern Haryana State, India in February-March 2001 after an apparent absence from the state for over 80 years. Two were still present in April 2001. The preferred habitat and behaviour are described, and the main identification features of the three plumages involved are presented, illustrated with a unique series of photographs taken by Nikhil Devasar. The possible implications of these records are discussed in the context of our continuing ignorance of the species's breeding strategies (the nest and eggs have never been described).

Introduction

Over the years Stoliczka's Bushchat has also been known in English as White-browed Bushchat and Stoliczka's Whinchat. Hume^{1,2,3} and Whistler⁴ described the species and its occurrence in parts of northwest India. They focussed mainly on describing skins (mostly non-breeding plumages), and there is some confusion evident with other *Saxicola* species. They highlighted the lack of knowledge about the species's breeding biology. Rahmani^{5,6} has published the only recent works on the species, and his later paper is particularly comprehensive, reporting on his OBC-funded surveys and detailing all past records. He listed 15 recent sight records between 1978 and 1994, all from western and southern Rajasthan, and most in winter. His own surveys produced a further 86 birds in at least 18 sites, all in Rajasthan in 1993/1994 and all but one between 26 January and 12 February. He found no birds on his May survey and only one on his July/August survey. Thus all these recent records were

between 10 December and 6 March, except for single records from the Thar Desert in July 1993 and August 1978. There have also been a couple of more recent records from northern Gujarat (K. Kazmierczak pers. comm.). Rahmani also listed 27 historical records (mainly specimens) from India between 1860–1934 from sites in Rajasthan (6), Gujarat (4), Haryana (13 including Sultanpur and nearby Gurgaon in 1878), Punjab (2) and Uttar Pradesh (2). He also listed 18 records from Sind, Punjab and Baluchistan in Pakistan and two from Afghanistan between 1866 and 1942. Neither country has recorded the species in the past 50 years. All these historical records are between November and April except for Whistler's Punjab records in July–September in about 1919. As Rahmani says, there must be some doubt about some of these latter records as at least one of the specimens collected has been re-identified by Roberts (1992)⁷ as a White-tailed Stonechat *Saxicola leucura*, and the reed-bed habitats where they were collected is typical of White-tailed Stonechat and not Stoliczka's Bushchat.

For most of the past century this species has been very rare and it is now classed as globally vulnerable.⁸ Nothing is known about its breeding, and its movements are not clear. Rahmani and others suggest that it moves out of the Rajasthan deserts in the spring and returns in the monsoon (usually July–August) to breed. However the great bulk of the recent and historical records are for the winter months and there is no firm evidence of breeding in Rajasthan.

Current observations

On 5 February 2001 I flushed a bird from bare ground among short clumps of coarse grass on the edge of the overgrazed hard pan flats south of Sultanpur National Park 30 kms south west of Delhi. After it had alighted barely 3 m in front of me, I was struck by the amount of white in its tail, its wheatear-like stance and striking supercilia. I assumed it was a species of wheatear

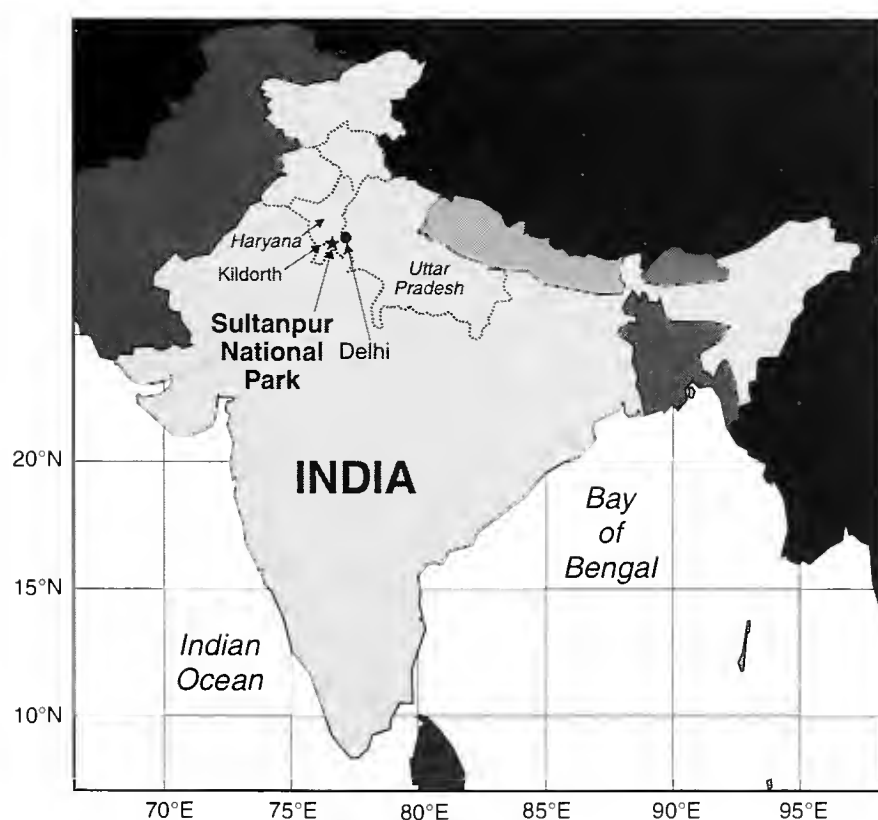


Figure 1. Map showing location of Sultanpur National Park, India

Oenanthe but, as I am familiar with all the likely Asian wheatears, I had to refer to Grimmett *et al.*⁹ before I could identify it as an adult male Stoliczka's Bushchat moulting into breeding plumage. The bird remained in the same area until at least 11 March, and was seen by several birdwatchers and photographed by Nikhil Devasar on 25 February and 11 March. On 28 February 2001 I found a second bird (this time thought to be a first winter male in a less advanced stage of moult) in very similar habitat near the village of Kildorth, 30 kms west of Sultanpur. He was still present on 19 March although he had moved his territory about 50 m towards the village with the arrival of (appropriately) Rajasthani herds-people who had recently set up camp there. On 2 April he was holding the same territory but he could not be located on 20 April. On 11 March 2001 Nikhil found and photographed an adult female at the Sultanpur male's site with the male having moved about 20 m to an adjacent grass patch. I saw the female on 14 March but could not locate the male. He has not been seen again despite six extended visits between 14 and 25 March and would seem either to have moved or been preyed upon. The female was still present on 2 April but could not be located on 15 or 20 April. I visited both sites regularly between November 2000 and February 2001 and do not believe that any of these birds were present much before the dates of discovery.

Preferred Habitat

Both Haryana sites are characterised by short (mostly <0.5 m) clumps of coarse grass, cut over by fodder cutters or lightly burnt over and located in more extensive areas of very short and overgrazed grass and bare sandy hardpan. Some taller sprays of grass remain, as do a few low stunted acacia shrubs (cut back regularly for fodder) often with a few higher (to 2 m) bare sprays much favoured as lookout posts by the chats. (Plates 1 & 2). Both sites are within 0.5 km of villages and are visited regularly by people cutting fodder and by grazing livestock and Nilgai (Blue Bull) *Boselaphus tragocamelus*. The Kildorth site has a few larger thorn trees around its boundary. The habitat at both sites seems to correspond to that described by Whistler⁴ and Rahmani.⁶ All three birds were extremely loyal to a small (<0.5 acre) area of this habitat and, although using the tall grass and shrubs as lookouts from which they launched aerial sallies or flew to the ground after insects, they fed predominately on the almost bare ground, rarely venturing more than 5 m from the grass clumps.

The Sultanpur female took over precisely the same territory that was apparently vacated by the male and used it in an identical manner, even favouring the same perches.

Behaviour

Apart from loyalty to a small site, the most striking feature of these birds was how confiding they were compared with the Common Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* and most Pied Bushchats *Saxicola caprata* in the same area. The adult male was especially so, allowing approach to 2 m (Plate 3) and the other two less so, but still allowing approaches down to 4 m. Although this has advantages for the observer once they are located, it does mean the birds can be quite easily overlooked, especially on the ground, and I walked close past them several times before locating them. They fed quite differently to Common Stonechats and Pied Bushchats and much more like some *Oenanthe* species. They usually perched on relatively high acacia sprays or isolated tall grass stems and located their insect prey up to 20 m away. Mostly they flew down to the prey on the ground and then spent a minute or two hopping round feeding (Plate 4). The other two species almost invariably return to a perch with their prey. Stoliczka's Bushchat also indulges in short aerial sallies of up to 20 m and will then usually return to the same perch like as in Muscicapidae spp. Indeed, as Rahmani also noted, they are strongly attached to particular perches and on several occasions would fly round me to get back to a particular perch.

In the early weeks (5–25 February) the original male was very aggressive towards Common Stonechat, Pied Bushchat, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Crested Larks *Galerida cristata* and Greater Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* and an Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* which came within 20 m. The second male also chased off Common Stonechats, and on 19 March Crested Larks. The female was very aggressive towards a female Common Stonechat and a pair of Crested Larks on 19 March. Occasionally both males were heard to call a soft, deep *prupp prupp* call audible only at 5 m. On 25 February the Sultanpur male was singing persistently but very quietly (although audible at 20 m) a varied musical song with a few harsh and several 'conversational' phrases, reminiscent of a Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. So subdued was it that it may have been a sub-song. The Kildorth male sang an identical song on 19 March.

Puff and Roll Display

Rahmani⁶ describes the unique 'puff and roll' display which he suggests is probably related to feeding strategies. The Sultanpur male was seen to do this several times on the ground only during my third visit on 19 February and either just before or after chasing off another bird species. The Kildorth male was seen to perform it once on the ground on my first encounter on 28 February when I got close to him in the open. He was again performing on 2 April when he first saw us. Nikhil observed the Sultanpur female doing it from a high perch when he first approached to photograph her on 11 March and again repeatedly on the ground on 25 March when there were no other small passerines within sight. I think this threat display may be directed at close human intrusion as well as potentially competing bird species and possibly also even used as an attraction display. It does not seem to be related to feeding in any way although when on the ground the bird will appear to pick up insects in a rather 'nervous' way between displays, rather as breeding plovers behave if you are close to their nest or young.

Identification

Stoliczka's Bushchat is a very distinctive bird although a casual observer might overlook it as just another chat or, in the case of a female on the ground, a small pipit. The only published photographs I have seen are in van den Berg *et al.*¹⁰ which shows an adult male in late summer plumage, Rahmani⁵ which appear to show adult females although no date is given and Rahmani⁶ which appears to show a male in winter plumage; again with no date given. The description given in van den Berg *et al.*¹⁰ is of a late summer plumage adult male and the accompanying assumed juveniles are unfortunately not described. The illustrations in Grimmett *et al.*⁹ by Alan Harris are far superior to anything else published to date and the three figures are reasonably close to the plumages observed in Haryana except that the illustration of the breeding male is rather darker on the upperparts than any plumage I have yet seen. However, textual errors in the book might lead to confusion. The length of this species and Common Stonechat are given erroneously as 17 cms, equal to Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* which is a decidedly larger species. Common Stonechat is very close to White-tailed Stonechat in size (around 12.5 cm) and Stoliczka's, according to Roberts (1992), is about 15 cm. This seems correct as it is certainly longer than Common Stonechat with markedly longer bill, wings and

especially legs. Except when displaying it looks slim and rather wheatear-like, usually perching very upright on its long legs. Although the adult male bears a superficial resemblance to the extralimital Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* on account of the dark ear-coverts and distinctive supercilia, that species has orange-buff extending up the throat, a comparatively shorter tail (with triangular white patches only on the basal third of the tail), a short thicker bill, shorter legs and different habits. Confusion with White-tailed Stonechat has certainly occurred as referred to above, but in the field I find this inconceivable with reasonably careful observation. Apart from the different habitat and feeding strategies, the White-tailed Stonechat is a stockier species with shorter wings and tail in proportion to the body and quite different markings in most plumages. The female Stoliczka's, with its nondescript plumage, is perhaps most similar to female White-tailed Stonechat but it is much paler and should always be separable on structural comparison. Confusion with Common Stonechat is unlikely due to structure and tail pattern but well marked females of this species, particularly with unusually obvious supercilia, could mislead the over-enthusiastic observer initially. All three birds showed blackish patches on their underparts (including the throat in the case of the Kildorth male on 19 March). This was found to be due to exposed feather bases, presumably as a result of body moult. By late March both remaining birds appeared to have finished moulting.

Male plumages

The adult male steadily moulted towards breeding plumage between 5 February, when he was found, and 11 March, when he was last seen. When first found he was streaked greyish-brown above with a striking narrowly dark-streaked crown and a usually concealed white patch on the inner upperwing. Pale buff tips on the inner upperwing greater coverts formed a wing bar and there was another white patch on the upperwing primary coverts (*Plate 5*). The upperwing lesser and median coverts appeared to be distinctly edged with black (*Plate 6*) and the underwing was whitish. These features intensified over the subsequent weeks with the upper parts becoming progressively darker. At all times the bird showed long whitish supercilia almost meeting above the bill (*Plate 7*) and extending to the sides of the nape. The ear coverts were initially rather mottled blackish-brown but became almost solid black by March (*Plate 7*). The throat was always distinctly white sharply contrasting with the buffish-peach

washed breast (colour most intense on upper breast) and rest of the underparts down to the vent (*Plate 8*). This contrast was visible at some distance. The tail appeared completely dark brown when the bird was perched with distinct whitish uppertail coverts. In flight the tail displayed a wheatear-like pattern with dark brown central tail feathers and dark brown tips to the rest with extensive broad white inner webs to all the feathers apart from the central pair. This white was also visible on the undertail both when closed and spread. (*Plate 9*). The bill was black, fairly long and slender. The legs and feet were black and the eyes were dark brown.

The Kildorth male on 28 February and 5 March was in similar plumage to the Sultanpur bird on 5 February but with less black on the ear coverts and no white on the upperwing coverts. Its underparts and tail pattern were identical to the original bird; hence it was also identified as a male. Overall he was a more greyish-brown bird with fewer contrasts although he too had the striking supercilia and blackish borders to the upperwing lesser and median coverts. The fact that he was less advanced towards breeding plumage suggests he was probably a first winter male. By 19 March his ear-coverts were quite dark and the white in the wing and tail was striking. By 2 April he appeared to be in full breeding plumage and I noticed he had a slightly withered left leg.

Female plumage

The female was a very different looking bird to the males although readily identifiable on structure and behaviour. However, *Plates 10 & 11* (taken within an hour of each other) show how different the bird could appear if it was displaying and its feathers were puffed up. It was pale brownish-grey above with dark streaking, particularly on the crown, and superficially appeared very pipit-like from behind. It had a very distinct buff wing-bar formed by the tips of the upperwing greater coverts and pale fringes to the outer webs of the inner secondaries forming a subtle panel on the closed wing. There were some dark edges to the upperwing lesser and median coverts but no white patches in the upperwing (*Plate 12*). It showed similar long whitish supercilia to the male, almost meeting over the bill but the ear coverts were pale, lightly streaked brownish-grey (*Plate 13*). The throat and breast were dull whitish buff with no contrast between throat and breast. The belly, vent and under tail coverts were slightly darker, very pale

orange buff with the upper tail coverts significantly darker orange-buff and very obvious in flight. The inner webs of the outer tail feathers were a similar dark buffish colour and the central tail feathers and tips to the other tail feathers were contrasting dark brown (*Plate 13*). The bill, eye and leg colour were similar to the male with the bill possibly slightly shorter.

Possible Breeding Strategies

In view of the recent preponderance of wintering records and continuing lack of breeding evidence, the desert biotopes in Rajasthan are clearly a main wintering area, which the species seems to return to towards the end of the monsoon (*vide* August 1978 and July 1993 records). I suggest that at least some of the population may usually breed elsewhere in March–June (when there is minimal risk of flooding of its flood-prone habitat and when other lowland Indian chats breed), perhaps in the desert type biotopes described above but in less climatically harsh areas to the east such as Haryana. Such habitats are now very restricted by irrigated cultivation in much of the state but they are still relatively widespread and the species only appears to need a very small territory. These areas are probably hardly ever visited by birdwatchers, particularly in the hot summer months, so the species could easily have been overlooked. It is also possible that the overgrazing and scrub clearance for firewood in these habitats, intensified in recent years with the increasing human population, has created more suitable vegetation and the species has only recently colonised (or re-colonised) Haryana. On the negative side, the practice of burning grass clumps during the spring and summer (to encourage new growth for livestock) may destroy nests and broods.

It is of interest to note that nearly half the pre-1934 India sites (13 out of 27) are in what is now Haryana, with Rajasthan, the focus of attention in the past 25 years, accounting for only six sites in the earlier period. While these Haryana records were also in the winter, earlier observers thought this was only a winter visitor to India and may not have looked for it at other times. Several of the Haryana sites (notably in Hissar District) are rather off the ornithological beaten track and may not have been visited by serious ornithologists in the past 80 years so its current status there is not known. At the time of writing it would seem that the adult male at Sultanpur moved on from his established territory (for reasons unknown) or (most likely) became a prey victim of one of the numerous potential predators. It is of interest that

the female remained for at least four weeks after he disappeared and the other male remained at Kildorth for nearly five weeks.

Conclusion

For so long an enigmatic and elusive Indian endemic, these 2001 records from reasonably accessible sites in Haryana give hope that we might soon unravel some of the mysteries of Stoliczka's Bushchat. Now that we have a good series of photographs and the preferred habitat is confirmed, others should be encouraged to look out for the species beyond the traditional (and usually winter) birding spots in Rajasthan.

Acknowledgements

Without the exceptional series of photographs taken by Nikhil Devasar this paper would have been barren. I am grateful to him for his sustained commitment to recording the continuing Stoliczka's Bushchat mystery. I also record my gratitude to Petrick William for driving me around Haryana (and explaining what I was doing to innumerable nonplussed farmers) as well as spotting individual birds on several occasions. Ewan Urquhart (currently preparing the much anticipated Helm tome on *Saxicola chats*) has been unstinting in his support and advice, and constructively and generously reviewed two drafts of this paper. Dr Asad Rahmani kindly reviewed a later draft. While acknowledging their contributions, I take full responsibility for everything aforesaid.

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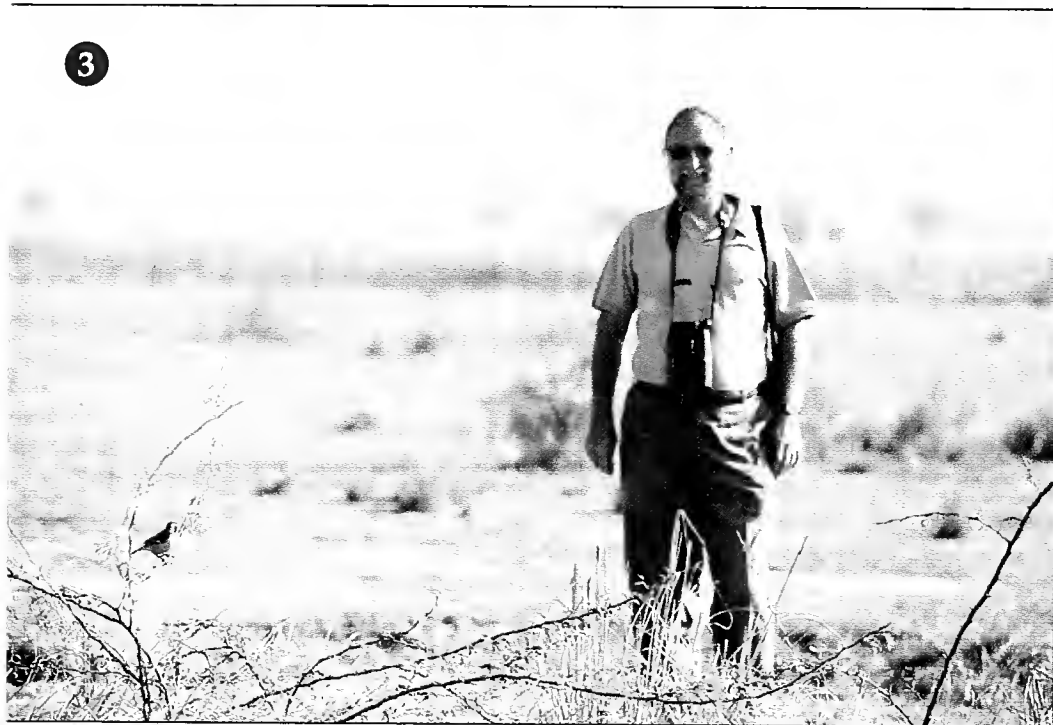
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- 1-2 Acacia shrubs at Sultanpur National Park (1) and Kildorth village (2), with bare sprays typically used as lookouts by Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha*.
- 3 The author with a male Stoliczka's Bushchat, Sultanpur National Park, 25 February 2001
- 4-9 Male Stoliczka's Bushchat, Sultanpur National Park, India. Photos taken on 11 March 2001 with the exception of plate 6 which was taken on 25 February 2001.
- 10-13 Female Stoliczka's Bushchat, Sultanpur National Park, India. Photos taken on 11 March 2001.

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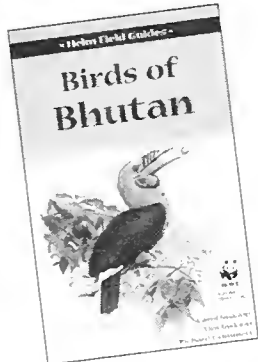
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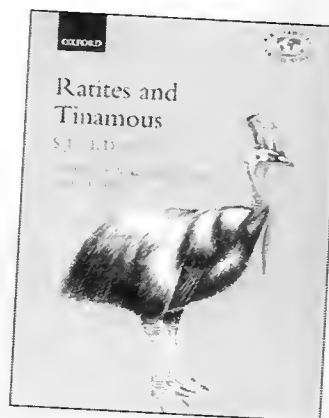
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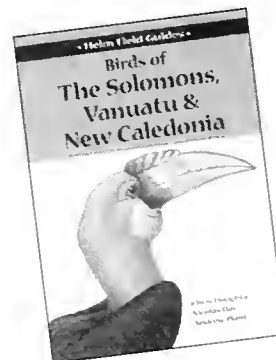
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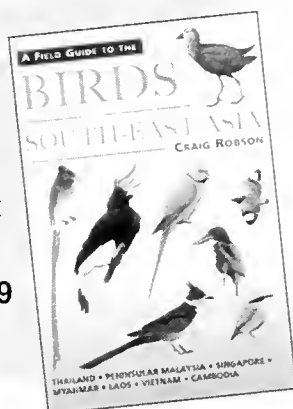
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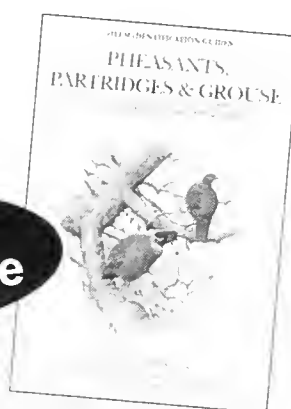
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Birds restricted to the Nansei Shoto include, for example, Okinawa Rail *Gallirallus okinawae*, Amami Woodcock *Scolopax mira*, Okinawa Woodpecker *Sapheopipo noguchii*, Ryukyu Robin *Erithacus komadori* and Lidth's Jay *Garrulus lidthi*. Whistling Green Pigeon *Treron formosae* is mostly restricted to the Nansei Shoto but also occurs in southern Taiwan and adjacent small islands, and small islands off the northern Philippines.

On the Izu/Bonin Islands, Bonin Honeyeater *Apalopteron familiare* – a White-eye according to recent study – is the only endemic although there were three more species but these are now extinct: Bonin Wood Pigeon *Columba versicolor*, Bonin Thrush *Zoothera terrestris* and Bonin Grosbeak *Chaunoproctus ferreorostris*. Izu Thrush *Turdus celaenops* and Iijima's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus iijimae* (a summer visitor to Japan) are both restricted to the Izu Islands and Tokara (which is situated within northern Nansei Shoto) while

Japanese Wood Pigeon *Columba janthina* is a little bit more widespread and occurs on islands around western Japan and southern Korea, but the Izu Islands and the Nansei Shoto hold its main populations.

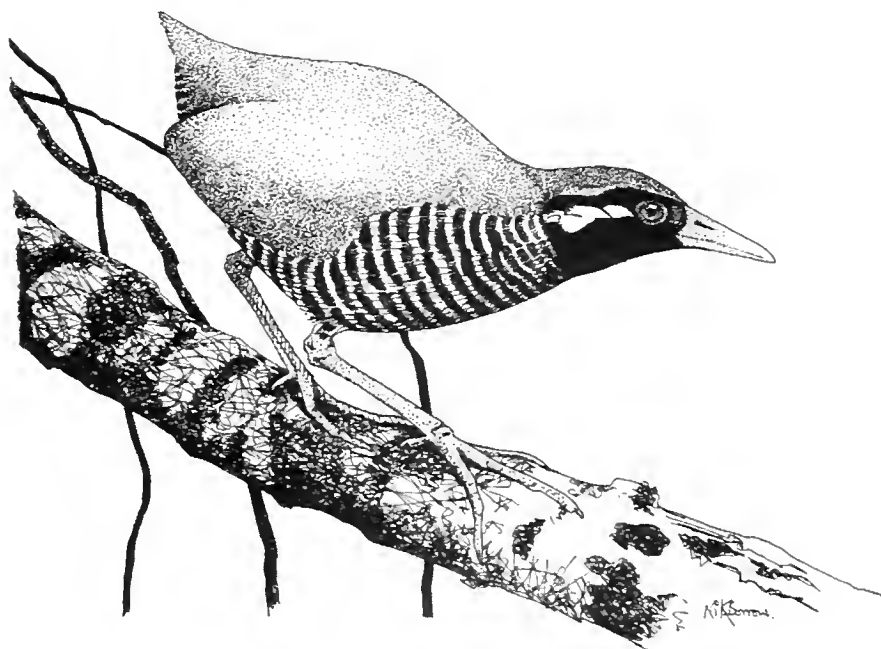
Following recent taxonomic reviews, several distinctive forms from these islands have been given species status: Ryukyu Scops Owl *Otus elegans*, split from Sulawesi Scops Owl *O. manadensis*, Ryukyu Minivet *Pericrocotus teginae*, split from Ashy Minivet *P. divaricatus*, Styan's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella pleskei*, a breeding visitor split from Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler *L. ochotensis* and Amami Thrush *Zoothera major*, split from Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma*. Some authors also treat Ryukyu Serpent Eagle *Spilornis perplexus* as a distinct species separate from Crested Serpent Eagle *S. cheela* of the mainland.

Many of these species are globally threatened. According to *Threatened Birds of the World*,¹ Okinawa Woodpecker and Amami Thrush are 'Critical', Okinawa Rail is 'Endangered' and Amami Woodcock, Izu Thrush, Styan's Grasshopper Warbler, Iijima's Leaf Warbler, Bonin Honeyeater and Lidth's Jay are 'Vulnerable'. Recent surveys have revealed that the range of Okinawa Rail has shrunk to 75% of its former range in just 15 years. Amami Woodcock has also shown a rapid decrease in recent years, probably largely as a result of the illegal introduction to the island of mongoose species in an attempt to control the deadly poisonous Habu *Trimeresurus flavoviridis*, an indigenous snake. Further studies may reveal that the status of some species, notably Japanese Wood Pigeon and Ryukyu Robin, will result in them being moved to a higher threat category.

However, these are not all of the spectacular forms occurring on the southern islands of Japan. There are several that have attracted rather less attention compared to the above species but which may well prove to be equally distinctive. The following three examples represent little-studied forms which may merit specific status.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos owstoni* (Plates 1–4)

This endemic subspecies occurs only on the island of Amami-O-shima. It is very dark, having the



Okinawa Rail *Gallirallus okinawae* by Nik Borrow

back and the wing coverts all black and also a black rump with white spots. The black stripe on the side of the neck is broad and joins the black of the back at the side of the upper breast. The breast sides and lower breast are mostly black especially on males. The belly is dark red with heavy streaks and the undertail coverts are dark red. The flight feathers have only small white spots. In fact, it is a mostly black and red woodpecker except for its buffy white face and throat.

Four subspecies of White-backed Woodpecker occur in Japan and these are (from north to south), *D. l. subcirris* of Hokkaido (the northernmost main island), *D. l. stejnegeri* of northern Honshu, *D. l. namiyei* of southern Honshu to Shikoku (the other main island) and Kyushu, and *D. l. owstoni* of Amami. There is a cline of reduced white and increased black from north to south but the differences are rather subtle and vague between the three subspecies occurring from Hokkaido to Kyushu so that distinguishing between adjacent subspecies is often difficult. In contrast, *D. l. owstoni* is highly characteristic and this is further emphasised by comparing it to *D. l. insularis* of Taiwan (south-west of Amami) which is rather similar to *D. l. namiyei* in colouration. This, *D. l. insularis* is the smallest of all the subspecies of White-backed Woodpecker and *D. l. owstoni* is the largest. *D. l. fohkiensis* of south-east China is said to be nearly as dark as *D. l. owstoni*, but literature on this form is scarce.

D. l. owstoni is surely an endangered form. It is confined to Amami-O-shima and even on this small island its occurrence is patchy. It inhabits mature native forest and the extent of the habitat is estimated at less than 100 km² and its density is estimated at 1.5 birds/km².

Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina owstoni* (Plates 5–7)

This subspecies is said to be distributed as a resident throughout the Nansei Shoto from the island of Tanegashima in the north to Iriomote in the south. Its true status remains largely unclear, and at least on Yaku-shima and Naka-no-shima of northern Nansei Shoto, it is known to be a summer visitor.

Three subspecies are generally recognised within Narcissus Flycatcher: *F. n. narcissina* of Sakhalin and mainland Japan; *F. n. elisae* of north-east China and *F. n. owstoni* of Nansei Shoto. *F. n. elisae* is now often regarded as a distinct species: Green-backed or Chinese Flycatcher. Although *F. n. owstoni* is superficially similar to *F. n. narcissina* in plumage, it is in fact rather distinctive. In the male, the greenish tinged upperparts, the yellow

underparts lacking any trace of orange and the presence of some white on the tertials are all characters approaching *F. n. elisae*. The supercilium reaches the base of the culmen. The female is similar to female *F. n. narcissina* but the upperparts are tinged greenish. *F. n. owstoni* is also smaller and shorter winged than *F. n. narcissina* and this is more prominent in the southern (sedentary) populations. The moult strategy is also somewhat different to that of *F. n. narcissina* in which 1st summer plumage is similar to the adult plumage, whilst in *F. n. owstoni* the 1st summer plumage of the male is similar to the female and some individuals can be seen breeding in this plumage. The immature male plumage often shows similarities to *F. n. elisae*, with characters including olive upperparts, yellow rump and throat, white wing-patch and short yellow eyebrow often present.

The most significant feature, however, is its song. It is quite different from the song of *F. n. narcissina* comprising of shorter and simpler phrases, more like the song of Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia*. In playback experiments, playing a recording of the song of *F. n. narcissina* to *F. n. owstoni* and *vice-versa* produced only negative reactions. The variation in songs among the various islands, especially near its northern limit, is unknown.

Although the author does not know of any studies of its abundance, the population is thought to be small; it is restricted to small islands and at least on Amami-O-shima, Okinawa, Ishigaki and Iriomote (those where the author has some experience), its density is not high. In particular, it seems rare on Okinawa.

Varied Tit *Parus varius owstoni* (Plates 8 and 9)

This is an endemic subspecies occurring only on Miyake, Mikura and Hachijo islands in the central Izu Islands. It is considerably larger and darker than *P. v. varius* which is widely distributed on all the main islands of Japan and also the Korean peninsula and adjacent China. Its forehead, cheek, considerably reduced nuchal patch and underparts are all chestnut-rufous, whilst the upperparts are tinged brown. On the northern Izu Islands, *P. v. namiyei* occurs on To-shima, Nii-jima and Kozu-shima. It is interesting that the division between *P. v. owstoni* and *P. v. namiyei* is not between Hachijo and Mikura (approximately 80 km apart) but is instead between Nii-jima/Kozu-shima and Miyake, a distance of only 30 km. There is no cline through these six islands and *P. v. namiyei* is only slightly different from *P. v. varius* whilst very different to *P. v. owstoni*. It would seem

that the two forms have been isolated from one another for a long time, although only by 30 km.

P. v. owstoni is also known to have quite different breeding ecology to *P. v. varius*. The clutch size is three or four compared with six or seven in *P. v. varius*. The food-begging behaviour of the fledglings is more exaggerated and continues for two to three months after fledging in *P. v. owstoni* but only 20–30 days in *P. v. varius*. The vocalisations are also somewhat different between *P. v. varius* and *P. v. owstoni* but they have a complex and varied repertoire and more study is required.

There are six more subspecies of Varied Tit. Among these, three subspecies (*P. v. sunsunpi*, *P. v. Yakushimensis* and *P. v. amamii*) occur in the northern and central Nansei Shoto and are not very different from *P. v. varius*. *P. v. olivaceus* of southern Nansei Shoto on Iriomote (there is also an unconfirmed record from Ishigaki) is similar to *P. v. amamii* but is smaller and both the cheek and underparts are tinged buffy brown and the contrast between these is rather small. *P. v. castaneoventris* on Taiwan, adjacent to Iriomote, is another distinctive subspecies. This is even smaller (the smallest of all the subspecies) and the cheeks are pale while the underparts are deep chestnut, thus the contrast between these is largest of all. Finally, *P. v. orii* of Daito Islands is said to be similar in colour to *P. v. owstoni* but is extinct.

P. v. owstoni is restricted to three islands only, and although quite common on Miyake and Mikura, these are small and volcanic islands and the habitat is therefore fragile. The same applies to Hachijo but here *P. v. owstoni* is already uncommon.

Other 'species' worthy of mention, all of which occur in the Nansei Shoto, are Japanese Scops Owl *Otus semitorques pryeri*, Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda bangsi* (see Plate 10), Great Tit *Parus major nigriloris* and Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos osai*. Japanese Scops Owl is a recent split from Collared Scops Owl *Otus lettia*, and *O. s. pryeri* occurs at southern limit of Japanese Scops Owl, adjacent to Taiwan where Collared Scops Owl occurs. *O. s. pryeri* differs from the other subspecies, *O. s. semitorques*, in having unfeathered toes. The possibility of a difference in vocalisations is also suggested, although some vocalisations may be the same or very similar. *Halcyon coromanda bangsi* is different to its main islands counterpart *H. c. major*, in having strongly purple tinged upperparts and the silvery blue patch on the rump is paler and more extensive. Its vocalisation is also rather different from that of *H. c. major* and playback of recordings of *H. c.*

bangsi to *H. c. major* produced no response, although this was attempted only once. *Parus major uigriloris* is restricted to the southern Nansei Shoto and is a very dark subspecies having a small white cheek patch and grey underparts. The back is dark grey without any trace of yellow or green. There is a cline of reduced white from north to south through the Japanese archipelago but the differences in plumage between *P. m. nigriloris* and *P. m. okinawae* which occurs just to the north of *P. m. nigriloris*, seem significantly larger than those between *P. m. okinawae* and other northern subspecies. *Corvus macrorhynchos osai* is also restricted to southern Nansei Shoto and is a very small subspecies with a less arched bill, and is consequently superficially rather similar to Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*.

Japanese Wood Pigeon *Columba janthina niteuns* and Japanese Bush Warbler *Cettia diphone diphone* occur mostly in the Bonin Islands. *Columba janthina niteuns* differs from the nominate subspecies, having a violet tinge to the head and the neck. Its population is estimated at fewer than 20 individuals on the Bonin Islands, plus an unknown number on the small island of Minami-iwo-jima. *Cettia diphone diphone* looks very different in proportion from other subspecies, having a small body and longer bill, legs and tail. The vocalisation may also be somewhat different from other subspecies but the variations between all other subspecies require more study.

Copper Pheasant *Syrnaticus soemmerringii ijimae*, although not a small island speciality, is also a spectacular and interesting form. Four other subspecies (*S. s. scintillans*, *S. s. intermedius*, *S. s. Subrufus* and *S. s. soemmerringii*) show a cline of decreasing white from north to south with *S. s. soemmerringii* having no white at all. Immediately south of the range of *S. s. soemmerringii*, *S. s. ijimae* inhabits a small area of southern Kyushu. This form is very distinctive, having a large white patch on the rump. It is interesting to note how this subspecies has kept its highly distinctive character within its relatively small range which is continuous with the other subspecies' ranges. There are no natural barriers preventing movement at all. Unfortunately, it seems that release programmes of this form have caused increasing unnatural contact with *S. s. soemmerringii* and intermediate birds have been observed in some areas.

The above subspecies have attracted comparatively little attention, probably because they have not yet been recognised as full species. However, they are highly distinctive forms, and some of them are good candidates for splitting. It

will be worth paying more attention to them, both for the taxonomic interest and also for their conservation concern.

Acknowledgements

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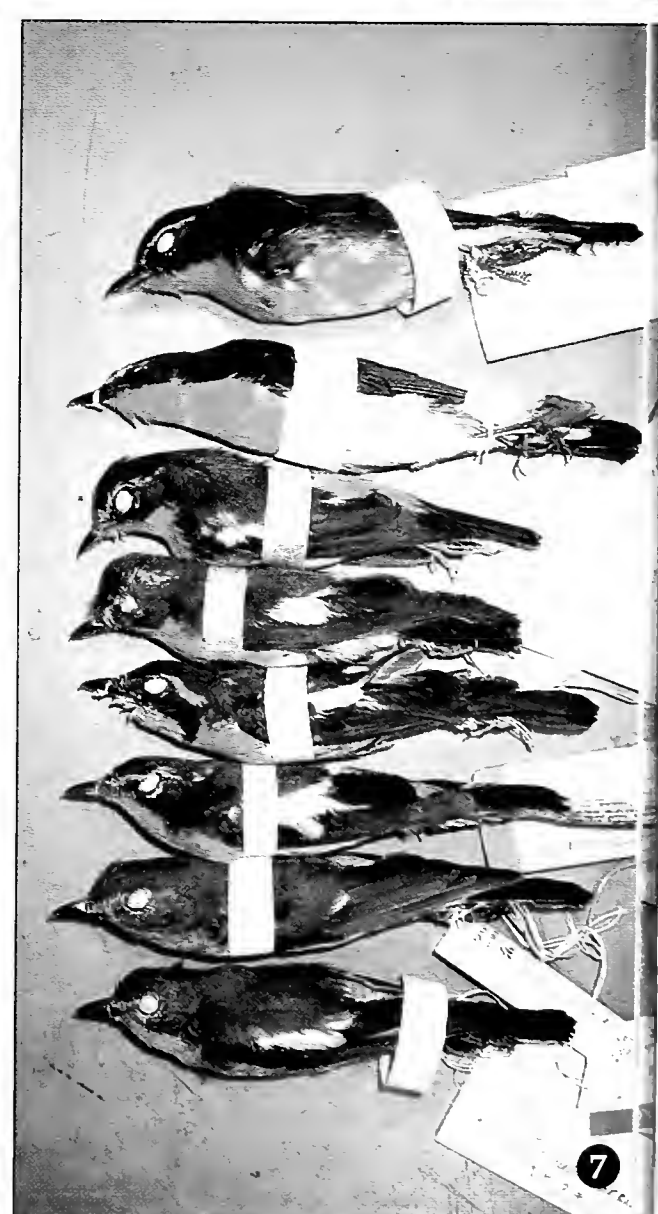
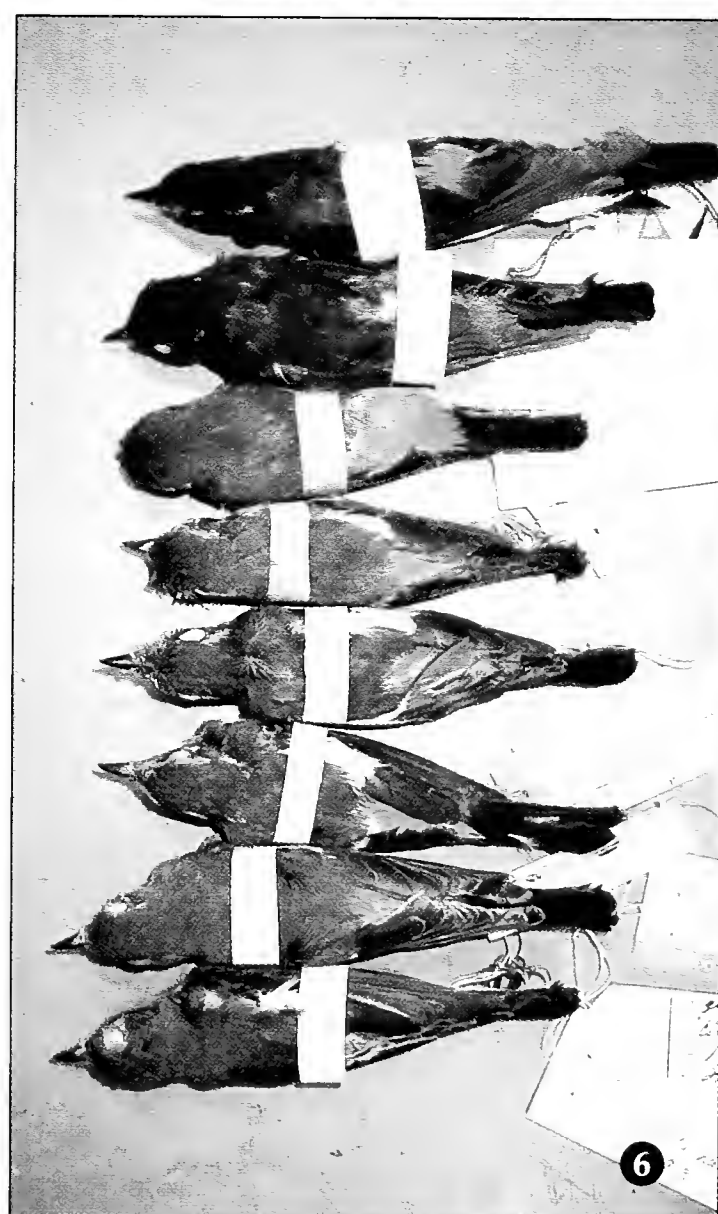
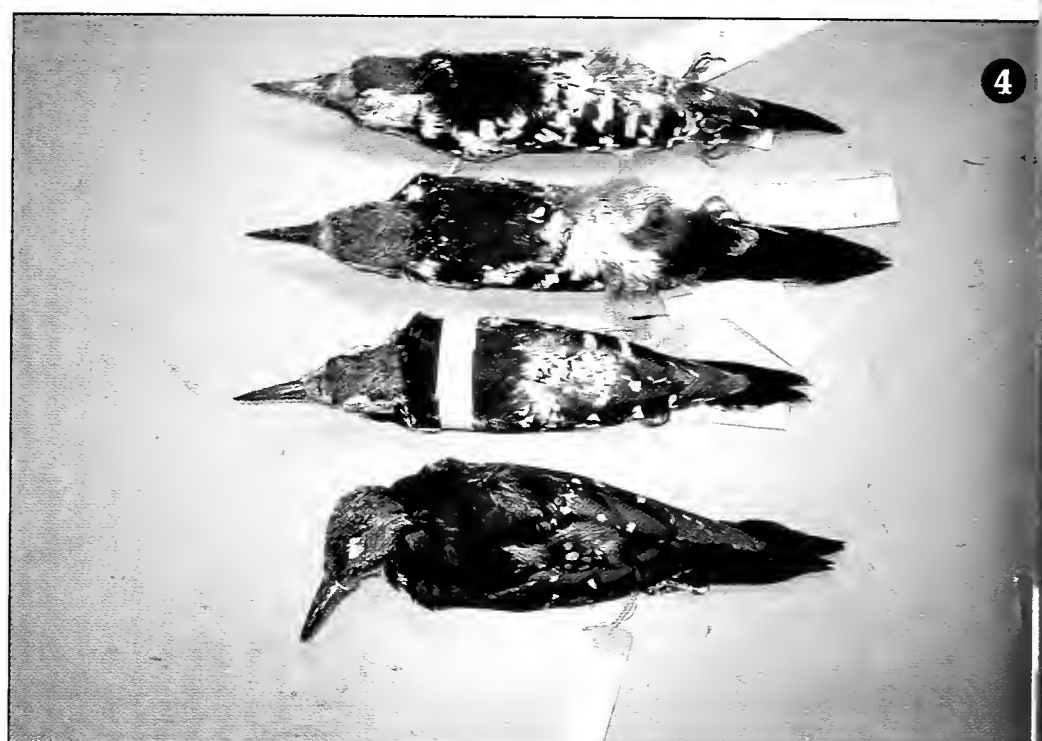
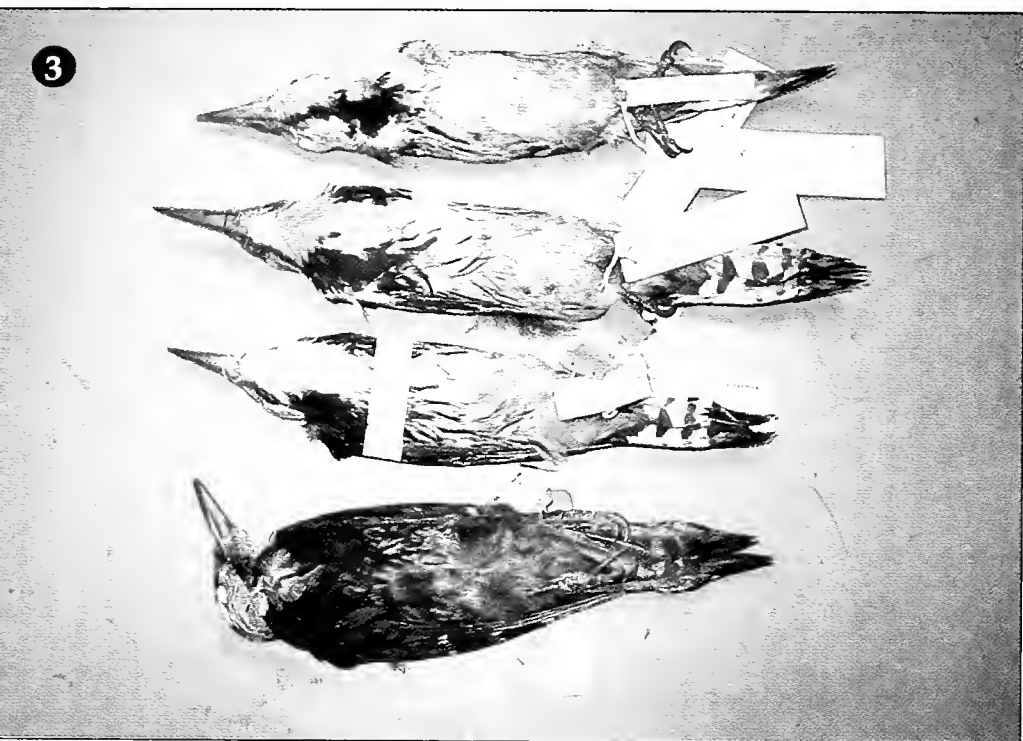
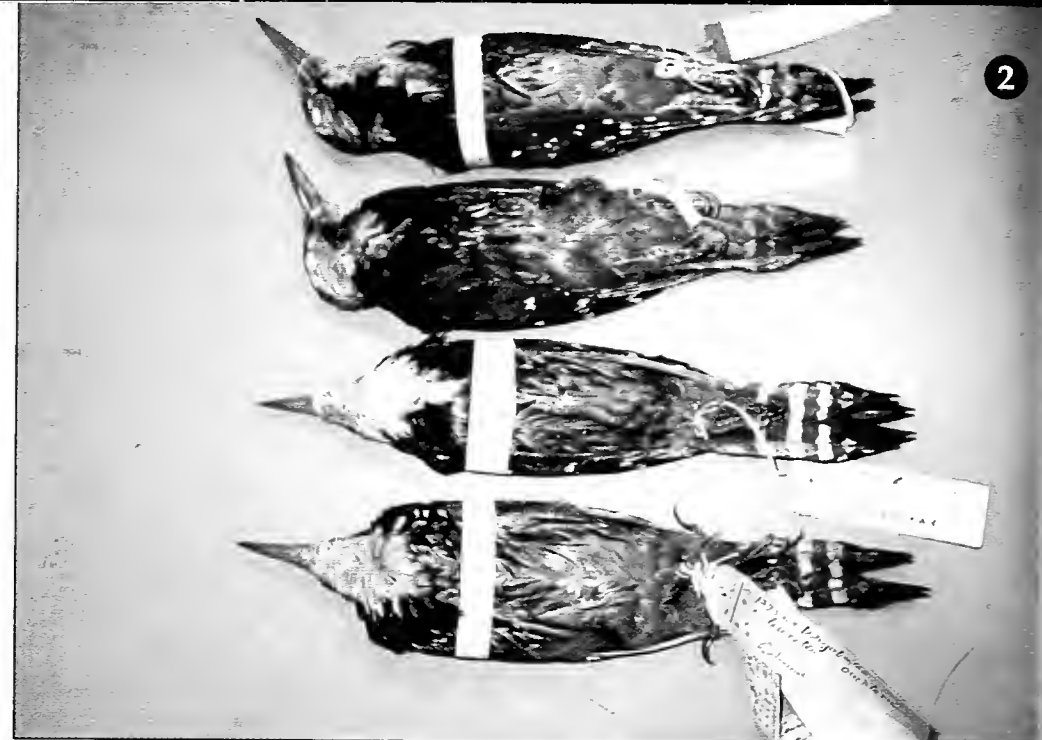
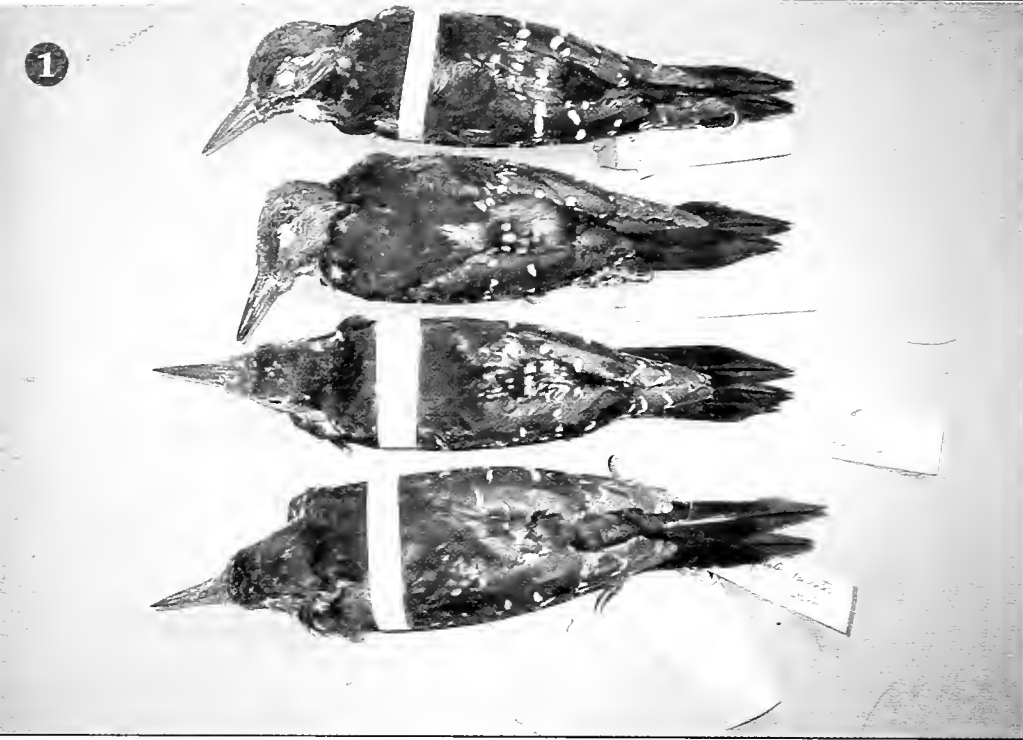
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Captions for plates on pages 30 and 31

- 1 Male and female White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos owstoni*
- 2 As Plate 2 but showing underparts.
- 3 Male White-backed Woodpecker (from top) *D. l. subcirris*, *D. l. stejnegeri*, *D. l. namiyei* and *D. l. owstoni*.
- 4 As Plate 3 but showing upperparts.
- 5 Male Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina narcissina* (upper two), then single male *F. n. owstoni* from Amami-O-shima (central Nansei Shoto), three male *F. n. owstoni* from Yaeyama (south Nansei Shoto), and two male *F. n. elisae* (bottom).
- 6 As Plate 5 but showing upperparts.
- 7 As Plate 5 but giving a lateral view.
- 8 Varied Tit *Parus varius varius* (upper two), then single *P. v. namiyei* of Kozu-shima, *P. v. namiyei* of To-shima, *P. v. namiyei* of Nii-jima, *P. v. owstoni* of Miyake-jima, *P. v. owstoni* of Mikura-jima, and *P. v. owstoni* of Hachijo-jima.
- 9 Varied Tit *P. v. amamii* of Amami-O-shima (top left), *P. v. olivaceus* of Iriomote (left, second from top), *P. v. castaneoventris* of Taiwan (left, bottom two), *P. v. namiyei* of Kozu-shima (top right) and *P. v. owstoni* of Hachijo-jima (right, second from top).
- 10 Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda major* (top two) and *H. c. bangsi* of Nansei Shoto (bottom two).

All photos by Otani Chikara



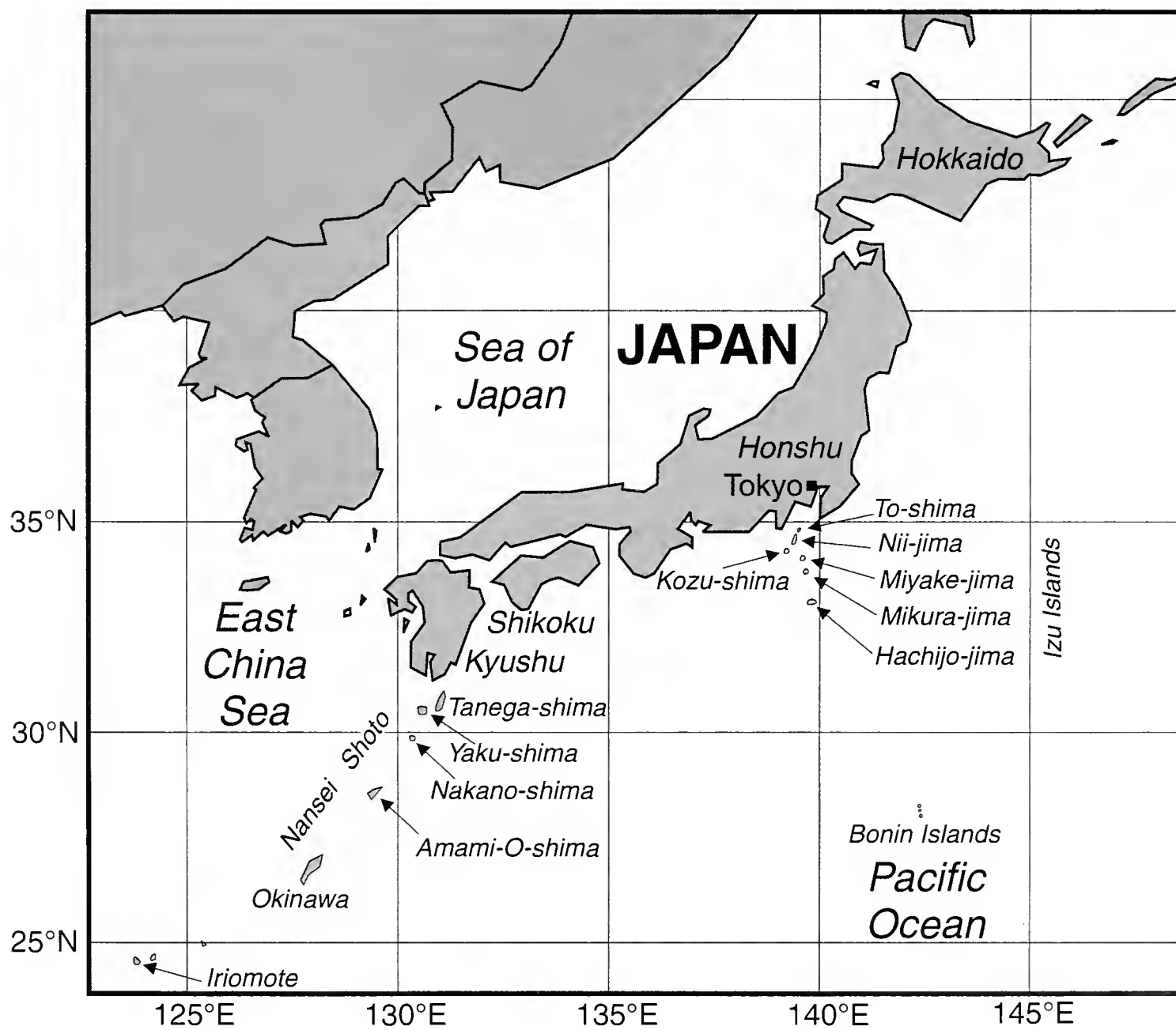
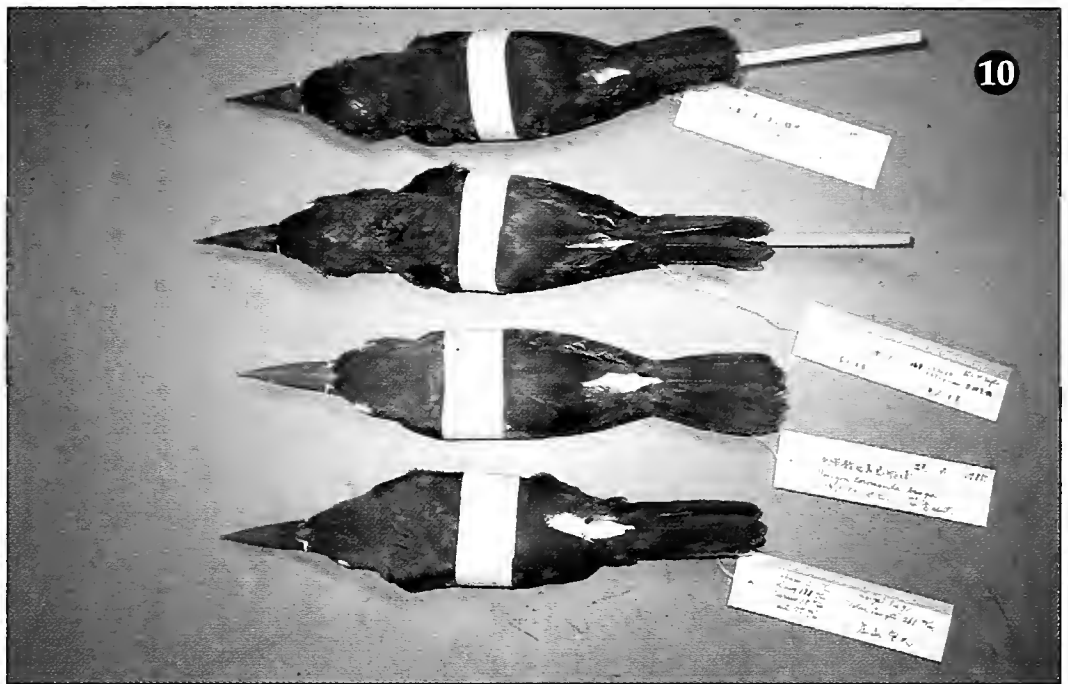


Figure 1. Map showing location of Nansei Shoto, Izu and Bonin Islands

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Ornithology at Lake Baikal: a brief history of research

Lake Baikal is often considered as a single locality in ornithological literature, but it is 640 km long and 40–80 km wide. Its axis almost follows a meridian, its northern end protrudes into the boreal taiga, while its southern end projects into the south Palearctic steppes. As a result, Lake Baikal covers a number of different areas, ornithological knowledge of which varies from moderately good to zero.

The first data on the birds of Lake Baikal and its surroundings were obtained by German naturalists in the service of Russian czarina Ekaterina II in the 1770s.^{1,2} Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811) observed a few bird species in the vicinity of Irkutsk and at Gusinoe Lake in March 1772.³ His fellow traveler, Johann Gottlieb Georgi (1738–1802), traveled around Lake Baikal in summer 1772 and subsequently produced the first list of birds of the region.⁴ The latter paper also included descriptions of two east Siberian duck species: Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* and Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*.

The next research initiated the Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographic Society launched in Irkutsk in 1851. Worth mentioning especially, is the journey by Gustav Radde (1831–1903) around the northern end of Lake Baikal in summer 1855.⁵ In July 1855 Radde observed thousands of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* in the Barguzinskij Bay. The species is now extinct at Lake Baikal.

The great impetus for ornithological research at Lake Baikal was a seemingly unrelated and geographically distant political event: the uprising of the Polish intelligentsia against Russian supremacy in 1863 (Poland was part of the Russian Empire at the time). Czar Aleksandr II suppressed the uprising and banished a number of Polish leaders to live in determined places in East Siberia.⁶ Benedykt Dybowski (1833–1930), a Polish zoologist and doctor, was sentenced to live in the tiny Kultuk village in the southernmost corner of Lake Baikal. He spent 14 years (1864–1878) at Lake Baikal and organised zoological research in the region, being in contact with local people and his fellow countrymen living in East Siberian exile, of which Wiktor Godlewski (1831–1900) and Alfons Parvex (1833–after 1890) are worthy of mention.^{7–9} Dybowski mailed many collected specimens and written notes to Wladyslaw Taczanowski (1819–1890) in Warsaw,

Poland, who published on the basis of these data a series of papers and summarised the results in the posthumously published work *Faune ornithologique de la Sibérie Orientale*.¹⁰ Numerous other data and the names of Dybowski's collaborators were deposited in the files of the Russian Geographic Society in Irkutsk, where they were destroyed during the fire of 1879.

After this 'Polish' period, ornithological research at Lake Baikal returned to occasional observations by local naturalists, supplemented by a few expeditions,^{11,12} notably G. G. Doppelmajr's and S. S. Turov's visits to the Barguzinskij Range in summer 1915¹³ and 1922,^{14,15} respectively, and Boris Stegman's travel around northern Lake Baikal in summer 1930.¹⁶ The situation changed only during the late 1950s and early 1960s when several mainly Irkutsk-based ornithologists, including G. K. Borovickaja, K. P. Filonov, T. A. Gagina, I. K. Gusev and I. V. Izmajlov, N. I. Litvinov, and N. G. Skrabin, started long-term studies of Baikal birds. In the 1970s they were joined by a new generation of ornithologists, including K. G. Beljaev, Ju. V. Bogorodskij, C. Z. Dorziev, Ju. I. Mel'nikov, S. V. Pyz'janov, and V. A. Tolcin.

Most of the research at Lake Baikal has been done by professional naturalists. The work of local birdwatchers was triggered and organised only by B. Dybowski in the 1860–1870s and by T. N. Gagina in the 1950–1960s. Since the 1970s, popular-scientific publications have been produced to inform local inhabitants of the birds and their conservation,^{17–20} but no comprehensive field-guide is currently available in Russian or Buryat and local birdwatching is virtually non-existent.

Uncritical lists of avian species recorded or reportedly recorded from various regions, which included Lake Baikal or its parts, were presented by Gagina^{21–24} in the 1950–1960s, and by Dorziev and coworkers^{25–27} in the 1990s. Reviews of local faunas are available for the southern Predbaikal'e,²⁸ Verchneangarskaja Basin,²⁹ Maloe More,³⁰ Ol'chon island,³¹ Uskanji islands,^{32–34} Svjatoj Nos wetlands,³⁵ Chamar-Daban,¹⁵ Vitim highlands,³⁶ and south-western Zabajkal'e.³⁷ See also the Red Data Books for Buryatia³⁸ and the Irkutsk Province,³⁹ and the monograph by Skrjabin.⁴⁰

Leaving aside short-term one-off visits, the only long-term research currently being undertaken at Lake Baikal is by a Czech team, headed by Petr Stýblo, which has worked at Lake Baikal since 1991 and focusses on the birds of the Zabajkal'skij National Park.^{41,42}

Much work has been done at Lake Baikal, but the numbers of local ornithologists and birdwatchers is negligible in comparison with the vast area they are 'responsible' for. There is thus considerable space for visiting ornithologists and birdwatchers who can add valuable data on both the distribution and ecology of Baikalian birds.

Note: Three untranslatable geographic terms relevant to Lake Baikal are widely used in Russian literature, although none of them is exactly defined. *Pribajkal'e* (Around-Baikalia) refers to Lake Baikal and its surroundings; *Zabajkal'e* (Trans-Baikalia) refers to the region east of Lake Baikal mainly to the southern steppe belt; while *Predbajkal'e* (Cis-Baikalia) refers to the region west of Lake Baikal. The latter two regions extend roughly 500 km east and west from Lake Baikal.

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Ornithologically important wetlands of the Lake Baikal area, East Siberia

Lake Baikal lies between Irkutsk province and Buryatia in the south of the Asian part of the Russian Federation. The Baikal area is one of the most easily accessible regions in all of East Siberia. Both major cities of the region, Irkutsk (60 km west of the lake on the Angara) and Ulan-Udë (100 km east of the lake on the Selenga) can be reached by plane from Moscow or by train from Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia. While the flow of visiting tourists includes a growing number of naturalists and bird enthusiasts, information on the local nature and birdlife is still very scarce outside Russia, and hard to find even within Russia. In this article we provide some basic information on selected

wetland sites at Lake Baikal and its wider surroundings (see Figure 1).

Lake Baikal area wetlands

Lake Baikal is a 640 km long, up to 80 km wide and 1640 m deep tectonic lake, located 130 km north of the Russian–Mongolian border. The lake is situated at an elevation of 460 m a.s.l., surrounded by high mountains with peaks exceeding 2,500 m a.s.l. The lakeshores are mostly steep, often forested down to the shoreline. Wetland areas directly at the lake are therefore limited to the openings of its tributaries. The most extensive ones were formed by three large rivers

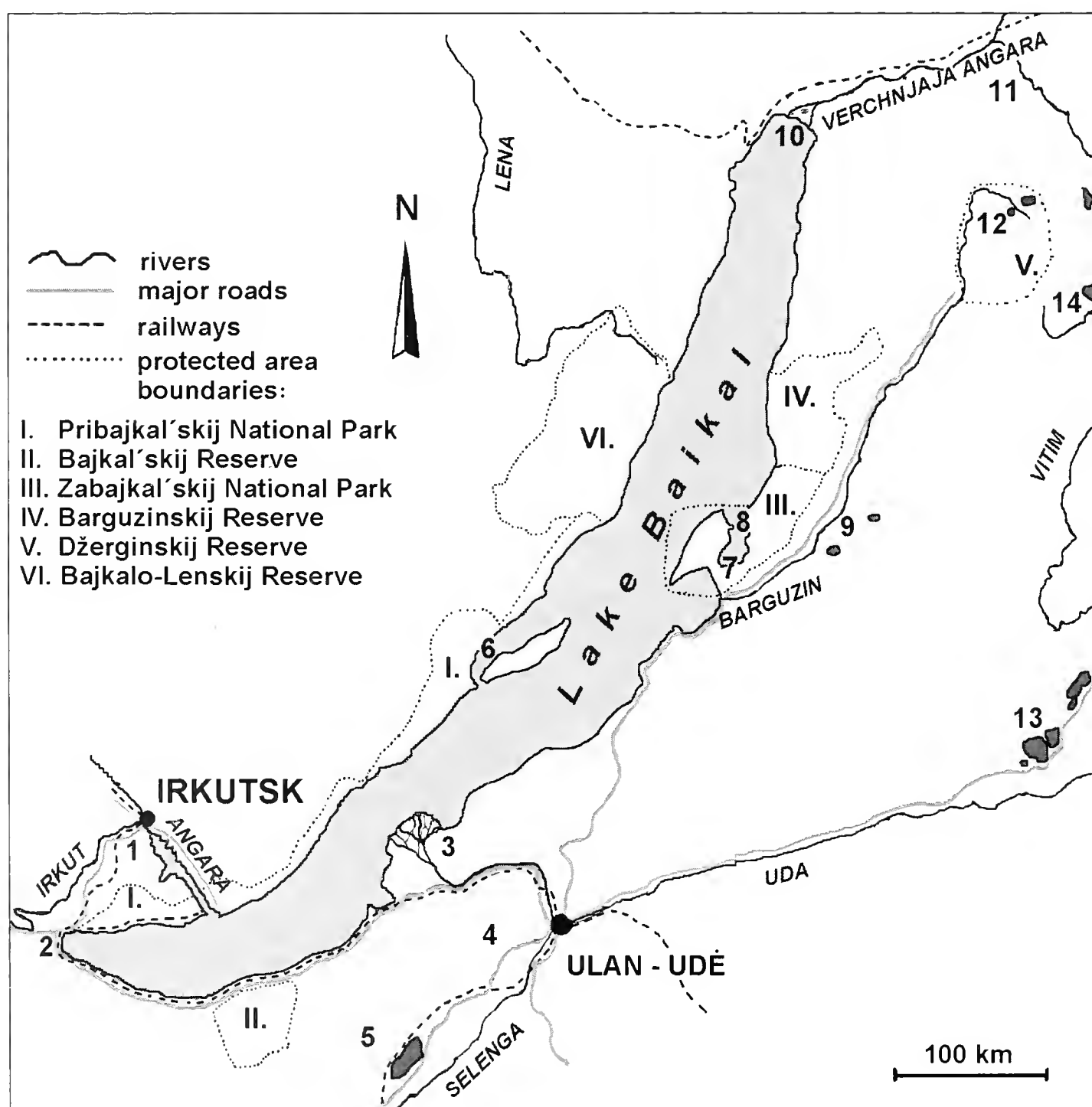


Figure 1: Wetlands of the Lake Baikal area described in the text. 1. Lower Irkut, 2. Kultuk, 3. Selenga delta, 4. Ivolginsk, 5. Gusinoe Lake, 6. Maloe More, 7. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, 8. Bol'soj ivyrkuj opening, 9. Barguzin inner delta, 10. Verchnjaja Angara delta, 11. Verchnjaja Angara inner delta, 12. Lake Amut plateau, 13. Eravninskie Lakes, 14. Bauntovskie Lakes

with muddy lower reaches – the Verchnjaja Angara (site # 10 described below), the Barguzin (# 7) and the Selenga (# 3). Before approaching Lake Baikal, the Verchnjaja Angara and Barguzin flow through broad valleys in which they form extensive ‘inner deltas’ (# 9, 11). These differ from other large wetlands mainly in being under higher human pressure – primarily for agricultural purposes. At many locations they are progressively drained and transformed to grazing land.

Over 300 lesser streams and brooks flow into Lake Baikal (e.g. # 6, 8). They are usually short, having clear water even at their lower reaches. Rather than forming deltas they have only small patches of wetlands at their openings, sometimes with a small lake separated from Lake Baikal. Sedge beds and willow thickets are typical habitats.

Larger taiga lakes are scarce in the region, an exception being the Bauntovskie lake system in the valley of the Cipa and its tributaries (# 14). However, the permafrost underlying lowland taiga holds large amounts of water year-round, forming shadowed pools in ground depressions. In the steppe belt at southern Lake Baikal, waterbirds can be found mainly at shallow, often saline lakes locally fringed by sedge and reed beds (e.g. # 4, 5). Frequently within tens of metres from these wetlands the habitat turns into dry steppe. Isolated patches of steppe with lakes more or less fringed by a vegetation belt can be found even north of the main steppe belt, particularly at Eravninskie Lakes (# 13) and in the Barguzin Valley (# 9).

In the mountain ranges surrounding Lake Baikal (e.g. Barguzin Range, Chamar-Daban Range, Lake Amut plateau) oligotrophic lakes with very little vegetation are locally common. As an exception, there is a eutrophic lake on the Lake Amut plateau (# 12) with an avifauna resembling that of the lowland river deltas.¹

Bird seasons in Baikal area wetlands

The Lake Baikal region has an extremely continental climate. Winter temperatures drop below -30°C and all lakes and rivers are covered with ice. Only a few duck species (including thousands of Common Goldeneyes *Bucephala clangula*²) remain wintering on an ice-free patch of the Angara at Irkutsk. The rather thin snow cover usually starts to melt in late March. Snowmelt and rainfall gradually produce a surplus of water that cannot drain off because of permafrost below the ground, turning all lowland areas into vast wetlands. Migrant waterbirds start

to arrive in the first half of April, when ice-free areas appear at southern Lake Baikal and at openings of rapid streams flowing into the lake. Waterfowl start laying eggs mostly in the second half of May in the southern wetlands. The breeding season at northern Baikal is delayed by 3–4 weeks. The rapid approach of a hot summer soon dries up most of the ground, considerably limiting the extent of wet areas to proper wetlands with their characteristic vegetation and fauna. Summer temperatures exceed 30°C at northern Lake Baikal and 50°C in the steppes at southern Baikal. Autumn migration starts with waders (*Scolopacidae*) arriving in the end of July and beginning of August. Terns disappear in late August, ducks in September and October, gulls in October. Geese are the last migrants to pass through the region – in October.

Wetland birdlife

The general birdlife of the Lake Baikal area is particularly attractive due to the mixing of different faunas. A number of European species reach the eastern limit of their distribution in this region, while a number of East Asian species reach their western limit here. Similarly, northern taiga species overlap here with southern steppe species.

The species composition of the avifauna varies considerably among the sites listed below, due to geographical and habitat differences. Species common in most wetlands throughout the Lake Baikal area include Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* and Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*. In the following site descriptions we do not mention these species.

Due to space restrictions we list only a selection of species occurring in the wetlands, based on available published records as well as personal observations of the authors and colleagues from 1991–2001 (Svjatoj Nos isthmus, Barguzin inner delta, Bol'shoj ivyrkuj opening, Lake Amut plateau, Ivolginsk, Gusinoe Lake region). We note here that for some of the wetlands (e.g., Bauntovskie Lakes, Verchnjaja Angara inner delta, Eravninskie Lakes, even Kultuk) very few observations have been published up to now (see Table 1). In addition, the avifauna of Lake Baikal wetlands is quite

dynamic, with changes ranging from year-to-year variations to decade-long processes, such as the disappearance of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* in the 1940s–1960s or the ongoing expansion of Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* since the 1970s. For most sites the species mentioned below are not to be considered as a snapshot of the local birdlife, as these data are based on a collection of reports from different periods, mostly from the 1970s onwards.

Survey of main wetlands

In the text below we describe 14 wetland sites, including all major sites and a selection of smaller sites characteristic of other wetland types.

1. Lower Irkut^{3,4}

Small patches of wetlands in a densely populated area at the lower Irkut and its opening into the Angara, located at the western outskirts of Irkutsk. This site is suitable for day-trips and can be easily reached by trolley bus or bus from the city centre (about 2 km).

Interesting published records of breeding species include Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* has been reported here on autumn migration several times.

2. Kultuk⁵

This is the first place where birds were regularly observed at Lake Baikal, thanks to Benedykt Dybowski, who was exiled to Kultuk village in the 1860s–1870s.⁶ Today the remaining wetland strip, about 7 km long, fringes the southern shore of Baikal between Sljudjanka and Kultuk villages.

Table 1. State of knowledge of local avifaunas. • data deficient; •• moderate (occasional data from different periods); ••• fairly good knowledge (long-term research). Sites are numbered according to the text and Fig. 1.

Nr.	Site	Knowledge
1.	Lower Irkut	••
2.	Kultuk	•
3.	Selenga delta	•••
4.	Ivolginsk	••
5.	Gusinoe Lake	•
6.	Maloe More	••
7.	Svjatoj Nos isthmus	•••
8.	Bol'shoj ivyrkuj opening	••
9.	Barguzin inner delta	••
10.	Verchnjaja Angara delta	•
11.	Verchnjaja Angara inner delta	•
12.	Lake Amut plateau	•
13.	Eravninskie Lakes	•
14.	Bauntovskie Lakes	•

It is accessible on foot from both villages, which are situated on the main Irkutsk – Ulan-Udë railway and road (M55).

The Kultuk wetlands primarily play an important role as a stopover site for migrating birds. The 19th century observations include Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* and Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*.

3. Selenga delta⁷⁻¹⁴

Extensive wetlands covering an area of more than 1,100 km² at the opening of the Selenga into Lake Baikal. The wetlands are characterised by a mosaic of wet meadows locally with isolated shrubs or trees, sedge and reed beds, willow thickets, pools and river arms. The configuration of these wetlands is strongly influenced by annual floods and the meandering of numerous river branches.

The Selenga delta is best reached from Bol'ðaja Reka or Selenginsk, villages on the Irkutsk – Ulan-Udë railway and road M55 (320 and 360 km, respectively), from Irkutsk. From either village proceed by bus to Ranurovo, or directly from Selenginsk by boat.

Birds of the Selenga delta have been studied by Irkutsk ornithologists since the mid-20th century, and the local avifauna is probably the best known in the whole region. The Selenga delta is undoubtedly one of the key sites for waterbirds at Lake Baikal, with breeding populations of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, dabbling ducks *Anas spp.*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Little Gull *Larus minutus*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Mew Gull *Larus canus*, Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*, White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* and summer records of Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*. The delta is an important stopover site for migrating Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* and for many waders including Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*.

4. Ivolginsk^{15,16}

The rolling steppe in the region of the Ivolginsk dacan (Buddhist monastery) is waterlogged in the spring and early summer, forming habitats suitable for many migrating and some breeding wetland birds. Similar habitats can be found throughout the steppe belt south of Lake Baikal.

Some deeper depressions (e.g., near Orongoj village³⁸) support permanent, usually saline lakes, at places surrounded by sedge and reed beds. The Ivolginsk dacan is best reached from Ulan-Udë by car or by bus, 40 km in the direction of Gusinoozersk.

Species recorded in the Ivolginsk region during the breeding season include Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* and Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* can be found in adjacent willow thickets. Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* occurs on migration.

5. Gusinoe Lake region¹⁷

This is a large lake (40 km²) in the steppe south of Gusinoozersk. The northern side of the lake is best approached from Gusinoozersk (115 km from Ulan-Udë by bus), the southern side from Gusinoe Ozero (140 km from Ulan-Udë by train).

Next to widespread Eurasian wetland species such as Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, many southern and eastern, predominantly steppe species, have been recorded in the Gusinoe Lake area. These include Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* and Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*.

6. Maloe More^{18,19}

Maloe More (the 'Little Sea') is a 76 km long and 17 km wide strait between Ol'chon Island and the northwestern shore of Lake Baikal. Waterbirds are found mainly in small wetland patches at openings of small rivers, such as Kuulga or Sarma. This site is included in Pribajkal'skij National Park. Maloe More can be reached from Irkutsk by boat (180 km) or by bus (350 km) to Chuir on Ol'chon Island. Ernorud village on the same bus route (300 km) is a suitable starting point for accessing the mainland river openings. It is possible to hike along the full length of the shores of the strait.

Breeding of Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* has been reported from here. Recorded migrant waders include Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, Little Curlew *Numenius minutus*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Eastern Curlew *Numenius*

madagascariensis, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* and Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*.

7. Svjatoj Nos isthmus^{12,20-27}

A wetland area (350 km²) located on the Svjatoj Nos peninsula isthmus at the eastern shore of Lake Baikal, north of the muddy Barguzin opening. Lake Arangatuj, connected to Lake Baikal by a narrow outlet, lies at the centre of the wetlands. Many waterbirds breed on the floating mats of vegetation inside the wetlands. The margins of the wetlands are interspersed with pine forests growing on sand dunes where the ground rises above the water level. Of the seven rocky islets in ivyrkujskij Bay north of the Svjatoj Nos isthmus, only Golyj harbours a large breeding colony of Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus cachinnans*.

Svjatoj Nos wetlands are situated in Zabajkal'skij National Park, with headquarters in Ust'-Barguzin. This village can be reached by bus from Ulan-Udë (280 km). The wetlands starting 5 km north of Ust'-Barguzin are accessed by a dirt road along Barguzinskij Bay.

Although smaller in extent, the Svjatoj Nos wetlands rival the Selenga delta in the number of occurring species. In the 1990s breeding was recorded, among others, for Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*, Black-throated Loon *Gavia arctica*, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*, Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, Smew *Mergus albellus*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Common Crane *Grus grus*, Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, the same gull species as in the Selenga delta, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*, White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Rusty-rumped Warbler *Locustella certhiola*. Other species recorded regularly in the breeding season include Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* and Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*. Several sightings of Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* in the 1990s are of particular interest. The wetlands as well as Lake Baikal shores attract an impressive variety of migrating waders, ranging from a number of *Calidris* and *Tringa* sandpipers to Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*, Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* and Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*.

8. Bol'soj ivyrkuj opening¹⁷

A wetland patch with a central lake and hot springs, extending from the opening of Bol'soj ivyrkuj into ivyrkujskij Bay 5 km to the south along the sandy shore. This is an example of small wetlands formed at the openings of many small rivers and brooks flowing into Lake Baikal. They generally support only a few breeding species, but many others can be presumably encountered on migration. Reliable data are available for very few of these wetland patches. This site, situated in Zabajkal'skij National Park (see Svjatoj Nos isthmus), is accessed by car from Ust'-Barguzin to Kurbulik village (50 km on a dirt road), from there by hired boat north-east across ivyrkujskij Bay to the river opening.

Breeding birds at this site include White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*.

9. Barguzin inner delta²⁸⁻³¹

Wetlands spread over 2,000 km² of the Barguzin Valley, along the middle reaches of the Barguzin. A variety of wetland habitats can be found here, ranging from eutrophic lakes without fringe vegetation and saline lakes in dry short-grass steppe in the south-east of the valley to extensive reed beds at its centre. The area can be accessed by a network of bus connections from the town of Barguzin at the southern end of the delta. Barguzin can be reached by bus from Ust'-Barguzin (60 km) or Ulan-Udë (340 km), as well as by plane from Ulan-Udë.

The avifauna of the inner delta is influenced by Barguzin Valley's role as a northern refuge for a number of southern steppe species. Breeding of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (dominant at salt lakes), Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*, Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*, Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* and Azure Tit *Parus cyanus* has been recorded here. Summer records also include Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* and Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. Corn Crake *Crex crex* and Hooded Crane *Grus monacha* were observed in the breeding season as well.

10. Verchnjaja Angara delta^{12,32,33}

A wetland area (560 km²) at the opening of the Verchnjaja Angara into the northern end of Lake Baikal. Its habitats resemble the Selenga delta. The town of Nineangarsk is the main entry point, reached by plane (from Irkutsk or Ulan-Udë) or by boat (700 km from Irkutsk). The bus route from Nineangarsk to Kiera skirts the western side of

the delta. The rest of the delta is accessible only by rented boat.

Reported breeders include Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*, Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Falcated Teal *Anas falcata*, Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*, the same gull species as in the Selenga delta and White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*. Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* and Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* have been reported several times from here.

11. Verchnjaja Angara inner delta^{33,34}

Wetlands covering 2,500 km² in the valley of the Verchnjaja Angara along its middle reaches. Novyj Uojan village, the main settlement in the area, can be reached by train or bus from Nineangarsk (see Verchnjaja Angara delta).

We found only a few reports in the available literature, including breeding Common Crane *Grus grus* and White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Hooded Crane *Grus monacha* collected on migration and Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* reportedly common on autumn migration.

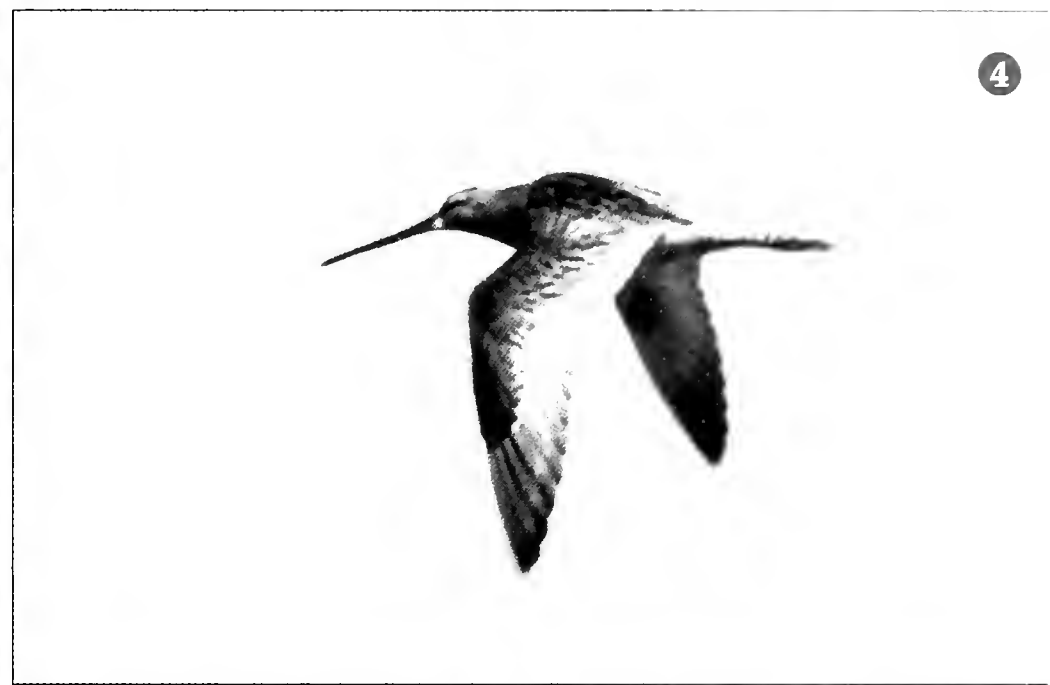
12. Lake Amut plateau¹

A plateau in the mountains at the source of the Barguzin with eight oligotrophic and one eutrophic lake. The latter lake (near Balan Tumor) is fringed with a belt of sedge and reed beds, while the oligotrophic lakes generally lack any wetland vegetation, being surrounded by taiga or alpine tundra. Similar mountain lakes are scattered in the wider vicinity of Lake Baikal. They are generally unexplored ornithologically, but presumably support an avifauna similar to this site.

The plateau is situated in a very remote area in Derginskij Reserve. Reached by bus 200 km from Ust'-Barguzin (480 km from Ulan-Udë) to Kurumkan village in the Barguzin Valley, then by

Captions for plate on opposite page

- 1 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, August 1991, Petr Stýblo
- 2 Little Stint *Calidris minuta*. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, August 1991, Petr Stýblo
- 3-4 Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* Selenga Delta, June 1992, Brian Little
- 5 Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* Chick. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, July 1993, Miroslav Šálek
- 6 Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, September 1994, Petr Stýblo
- 7 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. Svjatoj Nos isthmus, August 1994, Petr Stýblo



car 80 km to Umchej Island. If the Barguzin can be forded, one can proceed by a four-wheel drive vehicle on a dirt road a further 70 km to 'Kordon 81' and from there on foot 30 km up the stream of the Barguzin.

Black-throated Loon *Gavia arctica*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* and Mew Gull *Larus canus* nest on the lakes. Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*, Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* and White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* occur along the Barguzin river. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* nests in the surrounding alpine tundra and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* is ubiquitous.

13. Eravninskie Lakes³⁵⁻³⁷

Lake basin in the steppe within a broad valley (100 km by 35 km). Sosnovo-Ozerskoe on the shore of Lake Sosnovoe can be reached from Ulan-Udë by plane or by bus (350 km along road P 436).

Breeding of Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and summer observations of Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca* and Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* are some of the few available reports.

14. Bauntovskie Lakes³⁸

Lakes and lake basins scattered along 200 km of the upper reaches of the Cipa and Cipikan rivers. This remote area can be reached by plane from Ulan-Udë to Kurort-Baunt. Very few data are available from this lake system although the summer occurrence of Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* has been reported from here.

Concluding remarks

Only two of the listed sites, the Selenga delta and the Svjatoj Nos wetlands, are ornithologically reasonably known (see Table 1). Data from most other sites in the region are either scarce, from occasional short-term visits, or altogether lacking. Lake Baikal wetlands with their rich bird life promise excellent birding, which can provide substantial new data for the regional avifauna. The authors would be grateful if anyone who has visited the region sends their ornithological records to one of the addresses below.

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- 1 Male Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*
- 2 Female Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*

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The deteriorating status of the Indian Bustard

Ardeotis nigriceps

Introduction

Within Asia, India is third among countries having the most threatened species of birds. Only Indonesia and the Philippines have greater numbers of threatened species. With 85 bird species listed as critical, endangered and vulnerable, and further 52 as near-threatened¹ in India, it is a big challenge for conservationists to prevent their extinction. The Bustards and Floricans comprise a group with which I have been intimately connected for the past 20 years.

Four members of the Bustard family are found in India: the Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* of the short grass plains and deserts; MacQueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueeni*, a winter migrant to the desert regions of Rajasthan and Gujarat; the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* found in the short grass plains in western and central India; and the Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* of the tall, wet grasslands of the Terai and the Brahmaputra valley. All the resident bustards have been classified as endangered¹, but the Indian Bustard is approaching critical. In this short article I will restrict myself to the latter species only.

Poaching of tigers and threats of de-notification of protected areas have dominated the Indian media so much that the slow disappearance of other endangered wildlife has been overlooked. Not many people know that the Indian Bustard is now on the brink of extinction with an estimated population possibly as low as 600–700.¹ Although its present range largely coincides with its historic range, there has been a massive decline in numbers. It has become locally extinct in almost 90% of its former range and, ironically, it has disappeared from two sanctuaries created especially to protect the species. In other sanctuaries it is declining rapidly (Table 1). Previously, it was mainly poaching and habitat destruction that resulted in such a pitiful situation, but now mismanagement of the habitat, sentimental protection of certain problem animals, and apathy are creating havoc.

Conservation measures

In the early 1980s, the five states of India where the Indian Bustard was still found adopted conservation measures, and eight protected areas were declared.^{2,3} Despite these conservation

measures, the status of the Indian Bustard has sharply deteriorated during the last 10 years (Table 1). This raises the question of whether the sanctuary approach is appropriate for the protection of species that live at low densities in scattered grasslands and marginal crop fields. The sanctuary approach certainly helps in curtailing poaching but, unless appropriate habitat protection measures are taken, declaring a sanctuary for bustards does not help in the long run. Each bustard area has its own problems, a full description of which is beyond the scope of this article, but the major problems can be summarised as:

1. Habitat destruction and habitat deterioration: Too many domestic animals, disturbance during breeding, conversion of grasslands and so-called 'wastelands' into crop fields.
2. Poaching: Still widespread in parts of the Thar desert in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.
3. Increase in Blackbuck *Antelope cervicapra* and Nilgai *Boselephus tragocamelus* numbers resulting in crop damage and resentment by villagers against the conservation movement in general, and bustard conservation in particular.
4. Corruption in, and mismanagement of, bustard sanctuaries.
5. No clear cut land-use policy and domestic animal grazing policies in India.

The Indian Bustard is still found in many parts of the Thar desert, especially in Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Barmer and Bikaner districts, but in most

Table 1: Present situation in Bustard Sanctuaries

Sanctuary/Area	1985 Pop ⁿ	Current Pop ⁿ
1. Karera Bustard Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh	25–30	Extinct
2. Ghatigaon Bustard Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh	15–18	2–3
3. Rannibennur Blackbuck Sanctuary, Karnataka	5–10	2–3
4. Nannaj Area, Maharashtra	15–25	30–40
5. Sorsan, Rajasthan	10–15	Extinct?
6. Sonkhaliya, Rajasthan	80+	30–35
7. Desert National Park, Rajasthan	200–400	50–100
8. Rollapadu, Andhra Pradesh	60+	15–20

Table 2: Some additional areas where Indian Bustard has been seen

Area	Pop ⁿ 1999–2000
1. Lala and Naliya grasslands, Kutch, Gujarat	25–30
2. Near Nasikh, Maharashtra	8–10
3. Nasikh-Aurangabad border, Maharashtra	20–25

areas it is declining due to various factors. Perhaps the total number of bustards in the Thar desert is fewer than 500. It is likely that some unknown populations are surviving in the vast Deccan plains in south India, such as the two populations 'discovered' in 1998 in Nasikh (Table 2).

The need for Project Bustard

In India, Project Tiger and Project Elephant have shown that by identifying an umbrella species and focusing attention on it and its habitat, a substantial part of the natural ecosystems which benefit an array of threatened species can be protected. Bustards and Floricans can be considered as umbrella species of the grassland ecosystems. By conserving them and their habitats a very large number of species of the Indian grasslands can be protected. Protection and proper management of these grasslands would also benefit the local communities. India has nearly 550 protected areas but grasslands are under-represented.^{2,4} Some of the bustard sanctuaries have been destroyed by misguided management practices (e.g. Karera, Sorsan, Ghatigaon). There is no coordination between Indian states nor among the managers within the states. India has nearly 20% of the world's livestock, but no consideration is given to protecting the grasslands on which this livestock feeds.⁵ There is no long-term research on bustards, and at present we do not even know the basic biology of these highly endangered and declining species. Taking into consideration all these factors, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) recommends that the Government of India should start 'Project Bustard' along the lines of Project Tiger, with the following objectives:

1. To conserve all four species of bustards in India.
2. To conserve the range of habitats of the Indian bustards and their associated species.
3. To establish, with the cooperation of the state government and local people, more bustard conservation areas.

4. To supervise and coordinate management of bustard conservation areas.
5. To coordinate long-term studies on bustards and their habitats in different states.
6. To produce educational material for publicity for decisions makers, stakeholders, students *etc.*
7. To integrate bustard habitat conservation with national grazing policy and overall land use pattern

In the 1980s, we conducted extensive studies on three resident species of bustards^{5,6} through the funds provided by the U.S. Fisheries & Wildlife Service. After these projects were over, some follow-up funding provided by OBC, BirdLife International and WWF-India allowed further study on the Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican to be carried out. During the last five years we have been carrying out an environmental education campaign in the Thar desert of India where a major population of the Indian Bustard occurs, and tremendous support has been received from local communities. The BNHS has also started intensive media and government-level campaigns. No government, especially in a democracy, acts unless the general public show concern. This intensive campaign is planned for one year and we need national and international support from individuals and organisations. We therefore request that readers of the OBC Bulletin write polite letters to the following persons asking them to save the Indian Bustard by helping to start Project Bustard;

Hon'ble Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, South Block, New Delhi 110 011, India. Fax: 091-11-3016857/9817

Mr. T. R. Balu, Minister of Environment and Forests, Government of India, Paryavaran Bhawan, C. G. O. Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003, India. E-mail: mef@menf.delhi.nic.in

Mr. S. C. Sharma, Addl. Director (Wildlife), Minister of Environment and Forests, Government of India, Paryavaran Bhawan, C. G. O. Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003, India. Fax: 91-011-4363918

We would also request that copies of any letters sent to the authors are copied to BNHS for our records.

Asad R. Rahmani, Chairman, IUCN Bustard Specialist Group and Director, Bombay Natural History Society

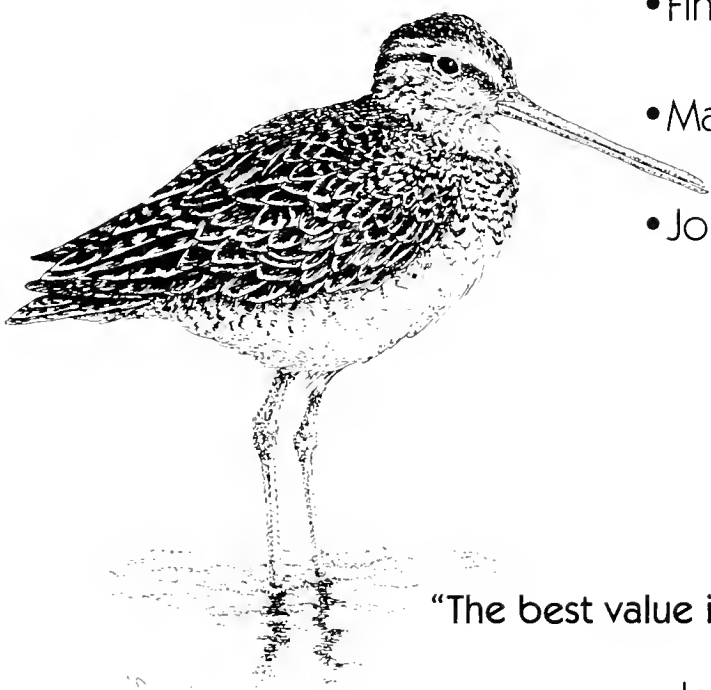
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An expedition to the summit of Khao Soi Dao Tai, Southeast Thailand

The Cardamom Mountains in SW Cambodia have been the focus of renewed attention in the past few years.¹ They were considered an important secondary Endemic Bird Area² supporting one full endemic species, the Chestnut-headed Partridge *Arborophila cambodiana*, listed as globally threatened (vulnerable);³ or two endemic species if the Cambodian Laughingthrush *Garrulax ferrarius*, previously treated as a subspecies of White-necked Laughingthrush *G. strepitans*^{4,5} is counted. They also support a few endemic subspecies of birds. The western rim of the Cardamoms forms the border with Trat Province of SE Thailand, though isolated outliers extend further west. The most significant of these is the mountain of Khao Soi Dao in Chanthaburi Province, which rises to 1670 m at its southern peak, and Khao Soi Dao Tai, 12°56'N; 102°12'E (see Fig. 1). Khao Soi Dao was established as a wildlife sanctuary, covering 747 sq. km, by the Thai government in 1972.

Khao Soi Dao has received some previous ornithological surveys, most notably during the Migratory Animals Pathological Survey (MAPS) when Ben King collected 391 specimens and banded a further 1,328 birds there during 25 February to 14 April 1966.^{6,7} King worked at a range of elevations, from near the hill-plains ecotone, 229 m, to 1,464 m, just below the summit. Among King's specimens were two examples of the distinctive subspecies of Chestnut-headed Partridge *A. c. diversa* for which the type locality is the nearby 924 m mountain of Khao Sabap (12° 33'N; 102° 12'E). These were both collected at 1129 m.

A number of birdwatchers have since visited the lower elevations of Khao Soi Dao. PDR and P. Coe birdwatched up to c. 900 m in 1982–1983. R. Harwood, who lived in Pong Namron District, Chanthaburi, for two years in the early 1990s, made some visits to moderate elevations, as did J.N Dymond in 1993 and 1998. Both the latter observers encountered *A. cambodiana*. However, so far as known, there have been no visits by ornithologists to higher elevations since King carried out his work there.

The authors, together with a postgraduate student, Mr. Dusit Ngoprasert, undertook a short survey trip to the summit of Khao Soi Dao Tai during 4–9 December 2000 in order to make a

preliminary assessment of the current status of habitats and wildlife. We particularly wished to investigate the status of Chestnut-headed Partridge and other Cardamom Mountain and Indochinese endemic species and subspecies. We used the Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Captive Breeding Centre, Pong Namron District, on the eastern flank of the mountain, as our base, because this offered the most direct access to the summit of Khao Soi Dao Tai. The head of the station, Mr. Sornchai Sankhalert, assigned two workers to accompany us.

We left the breeding centre on the morning of 5 December, and hiked eastwards up the mountain. Less than one hour after departure we found a small hut in the forest containing stored snares and the bright red fruits of an arum (Araceae), probably used as bait for birds. On a

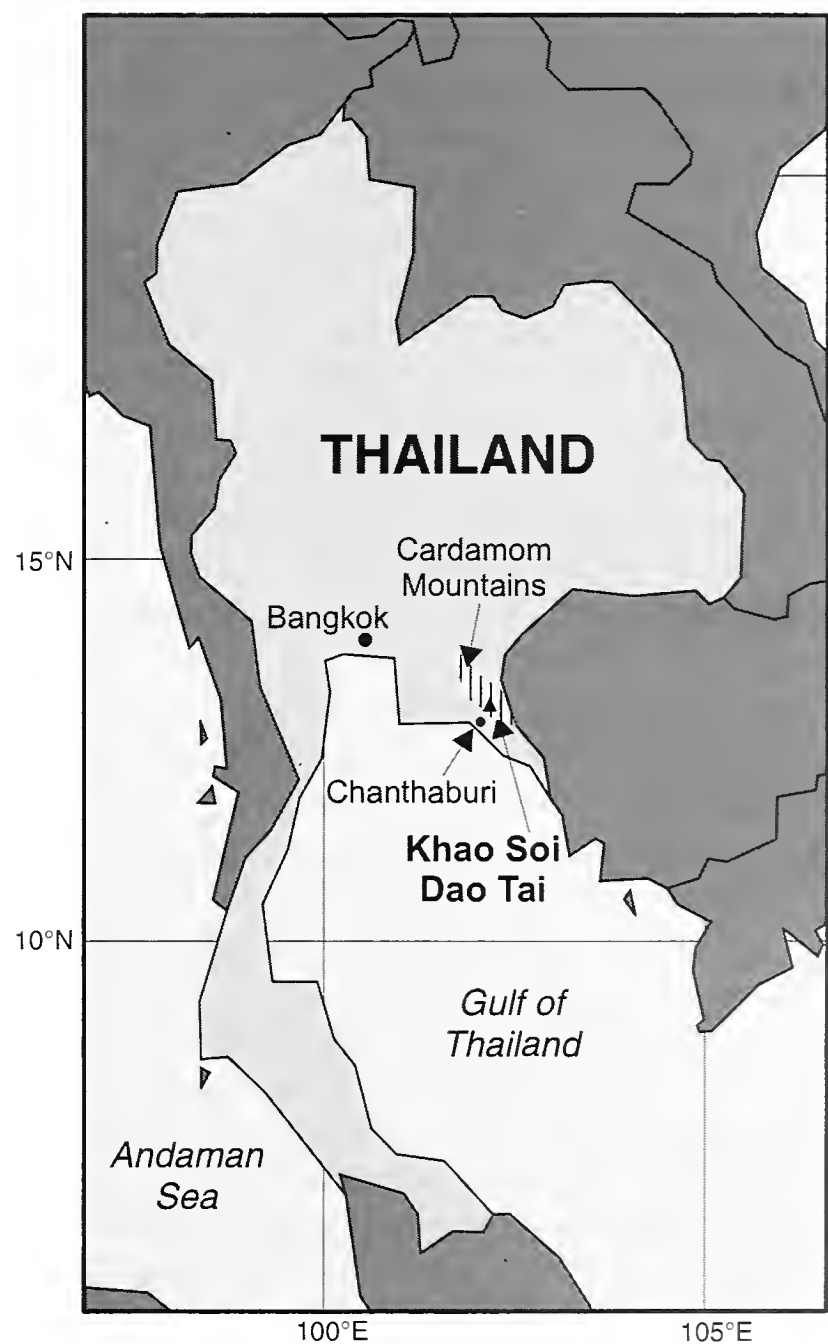


Figure 1: Map showing location of Khao Sai Dao Tai and Cardamom Mountains

midden outside the hut were feathers of Red-headed Trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus* and Blue Pitta *Pitta cyanea*. We hiked further up-slope to a campsite near a major stream at c. 1,000 m. The vegetation in this area was much disturbed, owing to the establishment of small plantations of cardamom *Amomum krevanh* in the area. Altogether on 5 December, during our ascent, we encountered five cardamom fields of 1–3 ha, while a sixth, where we camped, may have been as large as 7 ha. Each clearing had a small temporary hut, and some had PVC water pipes to conduct water from streams for irrigation and for use by the collectors who visit to harvest cardamom during the wet season. However, these plots did not represent a complete loss of wildlife habitat since they were surrounded by tall forest, while further trees were left standing in the clearings in order to provide shade. Nonetheless, signs of new cutting were evident; many trees had been recently felled and others girdled in order to expand the areas of cultivation. Tracks of what was thought to be a Serow *Naemorhedus sumatraensis* actually led on to the platform of the hut where we camped, where it had apparently come to eat discarded rice. Although the forest workers had told us that Chestnut-headed Partridge could be encountered around the cardamom fields in this area, we only heard Scaly-breasted Partridge *A. chloropus*.

On the following day, we continued up-slope to set up camp just below the summit, at c. 1,460 m. This site was known to the forestry workers as Bung Seato (*bung* meaning pond or lake, and *seato* presumably following its use as a camp by personnel from the SEATO Lab in Bangkok, a main locus of *arbovirus* and other studies carried out under the auspices of MAPS and the United States military-inspired South-East Asia Treaty Organization of the 1960s). We spent three nights camped here. Bung Seato was situated in a slight depression, less than one kilometre from the summit of Khao Soi Dao Tai. The area was clothed in montane forest surrounding a c. 0.5 ha open marshy area, with short grasses and a little open water. This was the source of a north-flowing stream – unfortunately I don't have any detailed notes on this, I also remember the low muddy areas all being well turned over by pigs. The forest had a more or less continuous canopy at 10–15 m, with a few taller trees of 20 m or more. There was a dense understorey in which a non-spiny palm was dominant. Large boulders and rock outcrops were present on some ridges, while fallen logs were scattered throughout.

Although the habitat quality at upper elevations was good, there was much evidence of human use. A well-used poachers' trail led up a north-east-pointing ridge towards the vicinity of our camp. This indicated that most poachers reached the higher elevations from the west, entering the sanctuary on that side and following major stream valleys, rather than from the steeper eastern flank. We found six set pig-snares along this trail within 1.5 km of the camp, as well as further pig-snares on both our ascent and descent. These used green nylon rope, camouflaged with intertwined leaves, and a bent-over sapling to provide the spring. The snare is triggered when the animal steps on a stick platform set across the trail. According to the forestry workers, one man may set 200–300 snares each trip. Elsewhere, there were many signs where dangerous gun-traps had been set, though fortunately none were active. These were usually marked at breast height with red string to alert other poachers. Many of the larger trees along main poachers' trails had initials carved on them. We found a camp-site with a rotting boar's head among the ashes, and encountered an armed hunter, newly ascended to the summit ridge. Men's voices were heard shouting below us on the west-facing slopes. Heavy human use of Khao Soi Dao and virtually all other protected areas in Thailand has long been documented.⁸ Much of this is from collectors of eagle-wood or *mai hom*, *Aquilaria crassna*, a highly-priced commodity. Such forest-product collectors hunt opportunistically. However, as *Aquilaria* wood becomes progressively depleted, hunting for meat or trophies for sale may take on increased importance.

In spite of heavy human use, signs of wild pig *Sus scrofa* were abundant at the higher elevations, with many tracks and small, muddy, water-filled wallows. Tracks of Gaur *Bos gaurus* were also found at three locations on the summit ridge (one with droppings, estimated to be not more than one week old). The droppings of Red Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak* were also seen. The only carnivore signs found were the tracks and scats, (containing bones and feathers,) of a medium-sized cat, possibly Asian Golden Cat *Catopuma temminckii* or Clouded Leopard *Pardofelis nebulosa*. Although some areas of the western flanks of Khao Soi Dao had a high density of Pileated Gibbons *Hylobates pileatus* when studied in 1980⁸, none were heard during our trip. However, one of the workers indicated that there were still 'many' in just the same areas previously studied, along the Khlong Tha Riu, where (he said) he had recently been fishing. The montane forest may not

have been suitable for gibbons, which prefer submontane forests, where *Ficus* trees are more abundant.

Other mammals included a few Variable Squirrels *Callosciurus finlaysoni* of the dark chestnut-red subspecies *C. f. cinnamomeus*, one Cambodian Striped Tree Squirrel *Tamiops rodolpheii*, a Northern Treeshrew *Tupaia belangeri* and at least four Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrews *Dendrogale murina*, including two associating together. The first *Dendrogale* was seen at 1000 m elevation in a brush pile on the forest floor, while the remaining animals were in the vicinity of the Bung Seato camp. When a tape of the high-pitched and staccato call, somewhat reminiscent of a *Tamiops* squirrel, was played back, two animals responded by running around the observer in a circle.

The bird fauna appeared to be rather species-poor. Only three, 20-species 'MacKinnon Lists' could be collected during three days in the vicinity of our summit camp, accumulating a total of only 30 species. Twelve species common to all three lists were Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*, Moustached Barbet *Megalaima incognita*, White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*, White-tailed Robin *Myiomela leucura*, Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*, White-tailed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus davisoni*, Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus*, two species of 'golden-spectacled warbler' *Seicercus* sp., White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps*, White-browed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis* and Black-throated Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*.

Ben King has also remarked (pers. comm. to PDR) that, on the basis of his survey, species richness around the summit was low, but that certain birds, among them White-tailed Robin and, interestingly, Green Cochoa *Cochoa viridis* (not encountered during this survey) were unusually abundant. However, Cochoas are hard to detect and would be much less vocal and less conspicuous during the time of our visit.

A single Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx renauldi* was heard at 1400 m, an unusually high elevation. Indochinese Green Magpie *Cissa hypoleuca* was frequent from about 900 m up to the summit area, though elsewhere is generally stated to occur predominantly at lower elevations.⁹ Two Blue-rumped Pittas *Pitta soror*, a presumed pair, were heard giving the diagnostic breathless *chow* call from the margins of the *bung* on two successive early mornings.

The presence of two *Seicercus* species in Khao Soi Dao is confirmed from PDR's examination of specimens in Thailand Institute of Scientific and

Technological Research, Bangkok. One of these is certainly Plain-tailed Warbler *Seicercus soror*, which gives a diagnostic *tsrit* call (to PDR's ear like a truncated version of the call of Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*). The second is tentatively identified as *S. omeiensis* ('*S. tephrocephalus* group').^{10,11,12} The usual call was a short, low *tup*, or occasionally *tup-up*.

Some key Cardamom endemics seem to be absent from Khao Soi Dao, presumably due to its small size and relative isolation. In addition to the Cambodian Laughingthrush, these also include distinctive subspecies of Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris nassovicus*, and Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes mcclllandii canescens*, all of which were collected on the mountain of Khao Kuap, 1271 m, which lies further east, on the Thai-Cambodian border at 12° 23.5'N, 102° 47.5'E. This is discussed further elsewhere.¹³ Surveys of the Cardamoms detailed in Steinheimer *et al.*¹ revealed a few other montane birds new for Cambodia, otherwise found both in the Annamite Mountains and in NW Thailand (e.g., Grey-bellied Tesia *Tesia cyaniventer* and Spot-throated Babbler *Pellorneum albiventris*) but which are seemingly absent from Khao Soi Dao.

No pheasants were seen, although feathers of a male of the distinctive Cardamom race of Silver Pheasant, *Lophura nycthemera lewisi* were found on the descent. No Chestnut-headed Partridges were seen in the field, though the calls were heard around Bung Seato. These consisted of simple burring whistles, like the introductory notes of Bar-backed Partridge *A. brunneopectus*, and were heard early morning (twice), early afternoon (three times) and late afternoon (three times) on 7 and 8 December. The calls seemed faint, as if the birds were far away, but it is likely that the birds were closer to camp than suspected.

Without informing us one of the two forestry workers set six unbaited bird-snares near our Bung Seato camp, where he had seen signs of leaf-litter being disturbed on the forest floor. He succeeded in catching one Chestnut-headed Partridge, and we were presented with a live and undamaged bird in the worker's rucksack when we arrived back during early afternoon on 7 December. As we had not anticipated handling any birds, we lacked equipment to record biometrics. However, the bird was examined and photographed, a few body feathers were collected, and it flew away strongly when released.

The hunter we encountered seemed well aware of the distinctions between Scaly-breasted and Chestnut-headed Partridge, describing green-

legged birds, which he called *nok kataa*, and red-legged birds, which he called *kai jiap*. During such a short visit, no firm assessment of the status of Chestnut-headed Partridge could be made. However, the fact that none were seen and few heard would suggest that the species has been reduced by hunting. Although calling may be less frequent in December than during the breeding season (February onwards for the majority of insectivorous birds), an observer spending an equal amount of time in similar, good quality montane habitat in northern Thailand would expect to encounter one or two pairs of Rufous-throated Partridge *A. rufogularis*, for example, even in areas frequented by Hmong or Lahu hunters. The populations of Chestnut-headed Partridge on Khao Soi Dao and Khao Sabap may be at increased risk because these are such isolated mountains. It would appear that *A. rufogularis* (and possibly also *A. brunneopectus*) has already been extirpated from the similarly isolated mountain of Doi Suthep.¹⁴ Increased biological survey of Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, Khao Sabap National Park and other neglected forest fragments in SE Thailand is highly desirable.

Acknowledgments

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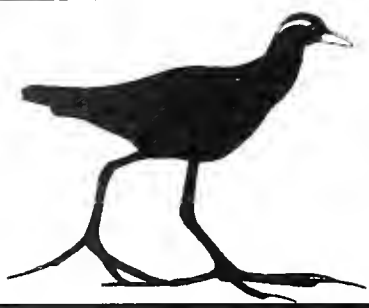
Chestnut-headed Partridge *Arborophila cambodiana diversa*, Bung Seato, Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, Chanthaburi Province, Thailand, 7 December, 2000. Both photos by Lars Pomara



1 & 2 Sumatran Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis*, November 1997, Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Sumatra, Indonesia by Andjar Rafiastanto/EU-INTAG/FIMP. These two photographs are the first record of Sumatran Ground Cuckoo for 81 years. The species is closely related to similarly shy and secretive Bornean Ground Cuckoo (placement) but it is considerably smaller and has bare-part and plumage differences (see page 56).

3 Bornean Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx radiatus*. Video-grab by Frank Lambert (see page 56).

4 Three Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* and an egret sp. on Sabtang Island, Philippines. This is the first record of the species from the Philippines (see page 58).



Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

China

World Wildlife Fund grant awards

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) recently announced that four projects in China have been selected to receive support from the Conservation Small Grants Fund. Projects to benefit are:

- Establishment of 'small protection zones' for the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus* and the improvement of protection.

The *courtoisi* subspecies of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush is found only in Jiangxi Province and according to IUCN Red List criteria, it should be considered 'Endangered' or 'Critically Endangered' in terms of both its population and its range. It is also hoped that education of the local community and agreement with villagers on protection will be achieved through the project, which starts in October 2001 and runs to the end of 2002.

- Research on the over-wintering Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* population in Wenzhou coast and its habitat protection.

China annually plays host to around 5000 over-wintering Saunders's Gulls, with more than 60% of the total over-wintering population concentrated in Leqing and Wenzhou bays of the Wenzhou coast in Zhejiang Province. At

present, Saunders's Gulls and other waterbirds are facing threats from human encroachment of wetlands, fish farming and other disturbances. This project will determine the status of the species' population, distribution and habitat, assess the habitat quality and threats, and improve the conservation awareness of government authorities and the public on waterbird protection. The project ran from August 2001 to December 2001.

- Research on the habitat fragmentation of Reeves's Pheasant *Syrnaticus reevesii*.

Reeves's Pheasant is a Chinese endemic and one of the most endangered Galliformes. Since the 1960s its habitat has shrunk by 50% and is now very fragmented. This may lead to inbreeding and the loss of genetic diversity, threatening the viability of the species. The project aims to provide a scientific basis for the protection of the species. The research will assess the landscape features of habitats, compare populations of different fragmented patches, study migration patterns among patches, population viability and breeding success rate to identify the key areas for the species' survival. The project will run from August 2001 to December 2002.

- Community-Based Conservation of the Derbyan Parakeet.

The Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana* is a globally Near-Threatened species,

native to south-west China and adjacent South-East Asia. A colony of approximately 100 individuals survives in and around a small village near Nuozhadu Nature Reserve, in Southern Yunnan Province. Local people protect the birds, which they regard as sacred. They have formed a small Parrot Protection Association (PPA) in order to promote conservation of the species.

This project aims to provide financial and technical support to the PPA. With assistance from the Kunming Institute of Zoology and Nuozhadu Nature Reserve, local villagers will strengthen protection of the groves of trees that the parrots depend on, put up artificial nestboxes and also carry out conservation education programmes in local schools.

WWF praises Chinese conservation effort

The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) has welcomed the Chinese government's launch of one of the largest wetland conservation and restoration projects in the world, by declaring the government's decision a 'Gift to the Earth.'

The initiative involves the investment of US \$1 billion over the next 10 years, to set up 217 new wetland protected areas, and ensure effective conservation of more than 20 million hectares of wetlands protecting the habitat of dolphins, seals, turtles, migratory birds and fish. It will also safeguard vast areas of

biological richness such as the Yangtze River and Lakes.

'We congratulate the government of China for its commitment to protecting these crucial areas for people and wildlife,' said Jim Harkness, Country Representative, WWF China.

This latest 'Gift to the Earth' represents the largest designation of wetlands by China, more than three times that of its total internationally protected wetlands to date.

Source: WWF Press Release, February 1, 2002

Reafforestation goes against the grain

The following is the edited text of a Xinhua News Agency report filed on February 20, 2002:

'For thousands of years, Chinese farmers have been bound to the land for a living. However, when the government asked them to stop growing crops and turn their farmland into forest and grassland to save the deteriorating environment, they accepted with great pleasure.

In 2000, the Chinese government launched a project to use grain surpluses as an allowance for farmers who return sloping and low-yield farmland to forest and grassland in more than 200 counties of 17 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in the central and western parts of China. More than 1.2m hectares of farmland has been returned to forest and grassland, and over one million hectares of barren land and hills were planted with trees. These numbers are set to rise to 2.2m hectares and 2.6m hectares respectively, in 2002.

The project has progressed smoothly because it is warmly welcomed by farmers, said Gao Xilin, director of the regional forestry bureau of Inner Mongolia. He described the grain-for-ecology project as a win-win deal, which makes barren hills green while bringing benefits to farmers.'

Source: *BBC Monitoring*, February 20, 2002

Himalayan Monal update

Yang Ziao-jun (Kunming Institute of Zoology) has clarified details on the first record of the Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* in Yunnan.

The specimen, of a male, originated from Qinglatong village (28°04'N, 98°38'E), to the east of the Salween river in the Nushan mountain range in NW Yunnan, and close to the borders with both Tibet and Myanmar, and in the Bingzhongluo district of Gongshan county. It was taken at 3,400 m in a mixed fir, rhododendron and bamboo forest on February 15, 2001. Villagers in the area reported the species as rare there but indicated that Sclater's Monal *L. sclateri* is also present. The specimen is being kept at the Gongshan Administration Bureau of the Goaligongshan Natural Reserve. These details correct several errors and add details to those originally given in *Da Ziran [China Nature]*, 5: 43 (2001) in Chinese, and then translated for *OBC Bulletin* 34: 48 (December 2001).

Source: *Tragopan*, March 16, 2002

Raptor recovery centre established in Beijing

In a move to protect wildlife from urbanisation, experts have opened what may be

China's first centre for large birds harmed by human contact. About 70 species including falcons, hawks, owls, vultures and other birds of prey – which often fly through Beijing on migration – are known to suffer due to water pollution and the use of agricultural chemicals. Birds of prey are also sold in markets and restaurants in the capital, and the city is a hub for illegal shipping of such birds.

Depending on members of the public such as farmers from Beijing's semi-rural suburbs to report injured birds, it is hoped the Beijing bird centre will provide the public with a better insight into China's birds of prey.

Source: *South China Morning Post*, December 17, 2001

Record count of Siberian Cranes

A record 577 Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* were recorded on passage at Melmeg [Momoge] nature reserve in Jilin province in April 2000, the Chinese magazine *Da Ziran [China Nature]* reports. This is higher than the apparent previous record at Melmeg of 422 in spring 1985 (*Threatened Birds of Asia*, p.1099) and is about a quarter of the world population estimated at 2,500 (p.1105). Such a large number of Siberian Cranes had not previously been recorded on passage at the reserve.

Source: *China Nature*, June 2001/Michael Rank

Hong Kong

Disney in the dock over new theme park

Preparation of the site for Hong Kong's future Disney

theme park could seriously threaten neighbouring ecosystems, according to an independent environmental study and may 'cause high level impacts on ecological resources.' The findings appear to be the most alarming to date about the US \$1.8 billion project which Hong Kong is banking on to rejuvenate its mature tourism industry.

The study recommended that threatened fish and plant species be transplanted ahead of the decommissioning exercise. Failure to decommission the shipyard site would pose long-term risks to the health of workers and visitors to the park, it said. The warnings were no surprise to environmentalists, who have blamed land reclamation and infrastructure works connected to the park for massive water pollution problems around Penny's Bay.

'I'm not surprised at all. Areas close to the shipyard used to be breeding grounds for lots of fish and corals, but they are now all dead because of the reclamation,' said environmentalist Sannie Chan. Ownership of the theme park is split 57:43 between the Hong Kong government and Disney. It's due to open by early 2006.

Source: *Reuters*, February 21, 2002

India

World Bank scheme threatens Sarus Cranes

A US \$286 million World Bank project which aims to convert 15,000 hectares of saline 'wasteland' into agricultural land in Uttar Pradesh may have to be amended as it would drain wetlands and endanger 1,000–1,500 Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone*, the

densest concentration of the species in the world.

Bird experts from India and abroad have asked the World Bank to review the project. They include George Archibald, founder of the US-based International Crane Foundation, Steven Landfield, who has done pioneering work with cranes, and Asad Rahmani of the Bombay Natural History Society. The experts are not asking the project to be stopped. Rather, they suggest that a few key wetlands in the 500 square kilometres area be demarcated and declared protected areas or as biospheres.

Source: *The Indian Express*, January 21, 2002

And Siberian Cranes bid farewell for another year

The lone pair of Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* wintering in the Keoladeo Ghana National Park near Bharatpur took off from the marshes on the morning of 4 March bringing an end to their sojourn this winter. The pair, considered to be the only surviving birds in the western flock of wild Siberian Cranes which winter in Ghana, stayed in the park for 115 days before taking their leave.

The arrival and departure of Siberian Cranes, to the 29 square kilometres sanctuary are major events for the officials here as well as the wildlife lovers in the area. 'The birds have left the Park in good shape,' S.P. Singh, Assistant Conservator of Forests, said referring to reports that the sanctuary had less water this time which led to a scarcity of food for resident birds as well as migrants. The departure of the cranes signals the end of the tourist season for

Bharatpur which witnessed certain unsavory incidents this season, including the murder of a park guide after clashes between two rival groups of guides.

Source: *The Hindu*, March 6, 2002

Indonesia

Sumatran Ground Cuckoo rediscovered

A recent sighting the ground-dwelling Sumatran Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis* provides welcome proof of its continued existence and gives fresh hope and impetus for future surveys for this enigmatic species.

The species was previously known from only eight specimens, the most recent taken in 1916, and all collected in foothill and lower montane forests in the Barisan Mountains in the southern half of Sumatra. A single bird was photographed by Andjar Rafiastanto in November 1997 at Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Lampung, during a European Union-Inventarisasi dan Tata Guna Lahan/Forest Inventory and Monitoring Project (EU-INTAG/FIMP) in Sumatra. However, the significance of the photograph was not realised at the time.

Although very little is known about the species, the extensive deforestation in Sumatra and the unfamiliarity of the Ground Cuckoo, even to experienced hunters in its known range, infer to have a tiny population and as such it was classified as Critically Endangered by BirdLife International.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 24 (1) (see page 53 for photos)

Sumatran biodiversity hailed by WWF

A survey by WWF has found that the tropical forest of Tesso Nilo in Sumatra harbours the highest level of lowland forest plant biodiversity known to science. But the forest could be lost in fewer than four years if the current rate of logging continues, and Tesso Nilo is not protected.

The survey found 218 vascular plant species in just one single 200 square metre plot – much higher than other humid, tropical lowland forests evaluated similarly in 19 other countries, including Brazil, Cameroon, New Guinea, and Peru.

Tesso Nilo is also home elephants, tigers, gibbons, and even tapirs but is being heavily logged by both small-scale illegal loggers and an international corporation.

On satellite images, Tesso Nilo stands out like a green ark harbouring Sumatra's unique wildlife in a rough sea of clear-cutting and plantations. Illegal logging in the country is a complex issue which involves various actors, including communities, bureaucrats, military personnel and global market interests.

Nevertheless, the Minister of Forestry has committed to crack down on illegal logging. WWF also called on the key consumer countries, notably the G8, to halt the international trade in illegal timber and at the G8 Summit in June 2002 to commit to purchasing timber from legal sources that originate from sustainably managed forests.

Source: WWF Press Release, February 1, 2002

Bridges to link Java to Bali and Sumatra!

An extraordinary plan to construct bridges between Java and Bali and between Java and Sumatra was announced by Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri on a visit to China.

The Chinese government promptly offered financial and technical assistance for these potentially ecologically disastrous schemes.

There was stiff opposition on Bali as the bridge is expected to lure more migrants – and cause environmental, economic and social problems. The Bali provincial government, local legislators, non-governmental organisations and visiting members of the House of Representatives all rejected the plan.

An obvious concern for conservationists is the choice of location for the bridge. Facing each other across the Bali Straits are Baluran National Park in Java and Bali Barat National Park. The first is home to the endangered Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* and, of course, Bali Barat is the only place in the world where the critically endangered Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi* still hangs on. A bridge built between these two locations would be a disaster.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, April 2, 2002

More Flores Monarchs

A new population of the Endangered Flores Monarch *Monarcha sacerdotum* has been discovered in Nggalak-Rego forest, 30 km from the nearest previously known locality.

Source: *Institute Pertanian Bogor/BirdLife International Indonesia Programme*

Poachers foiled

Poachers have again tried to steal Bali Mynas *Leucopsar rothschildi* from Bali Barat National Park. This time they were foiled due to the bravery of Komang Astika, a ranger, who was unfortunately shot in the leg during the bungled raid during January, 2002.

Source: *BirdLife International Indonesia Programme*

Pakistan

Houbaras under threat

It's been revealed that more than 8,000 McQueen's (Houbara) Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueeni* are trapped and smuggled out of Pakistan to the Gulf states every year. Arab falconers will pay US \$1,000 for each bird. The bustards are then used to train the falconers' prized Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug* how to hunt. Happily, some of the trapped birds are recovered and released back into the Pakistani desert.

The ceremonial release of 90 birds recovered from smugglers in the Gulf states, as well as ports of Pakistan, by the Houbara Foundation International was attended by Federal Ministers Shahida Jamil and Owais Ahmad Ghani – and the United Arab Emirates Ambassador, Ali Muhammad Al Shamsi. Speaking on this occasion, Shahida Jamil said that the imposition of heavy fines on Houbara smugglers will kill the economic benefit of the illegal trade in Houbaras.

But some Arab money is being spent on Houbara conservation. The president of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, has funded the Houbara Bustard Research and Rehabilitation Centre in

Cholistan where illegally trapped birds are rehabilitated before their release back into the wild.

Source: *The Nation Online*, March 21, 2002

Philippines

Black-faced Spoonbills sighted in the Philippines

A recent sighting of three Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* on one of the Batanes Islands, 200 km south of Taiwan, is the first confirmed record for the Philippines. The birds were observed between the last week of October and the second week of December 2002, frequenting a freshwater pool. The discovery was facilitated by posters featuring pictures of the species produced by Wild Bird Federation Taiwan (BirdLife in Taiwan) and sent to the Philippines by WBSJ (BirdLife in Japan) who are coordinating the conservation of Black-faced Spoonbills in Asia. A few days after distribution by local authorities in Batanes, reports were received from local people of spoonbills on Sabtang.

About 870 Black-faced Spoonbills are thought to exist worldwide, their main wintering sites being Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 24 (1)

Russian Far East

Russian forests under threat

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has warned that Russia's far eastern forests, one of the world's biggest areas of forest wilderness,

risked destruction within five years because of illegal logging.

The conservation organisation urged G7 countries, along with China and South Korea – two of the biggest markets – to halt purchases of illegal timber. Russia must tighten controls on timber crossing its frontiers and take other steps to enforce the rules, it said. And it added that corruption by local officials was a big problem with at least 20 % of timber logged in Russia cut illegally or in violation of legislation due to bribery and a lack of funds to enforce controls in an area the size of Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium combined.

The illegal logging in the Russian Far East makes up approximately 1.5 million cubic metres of wood annually. 'It is a highly profitable activity for smugglers and the local mafia,' the Swiss-based group quoted its Russian project manager, Anatoly Kotlobay, as saying.

The destruction of the forest area also posed a threat to a number of endangered species – including the Siberian Tiger and the Amur Leopard – which could lose their natural habitat, the WWF said.

Source: *Reuters*, February 28, 2002

Singapore

Singapore's unique mammals close to extinction

Singapore's only unique wild mammals – Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel and the Banded Leaf Monkey – have fallen victim to urbanisation and shrinking forests and are

perilously close to extinction, a researcher has said.

Peter Ng, the director of a museum on biodiversity at the National University of Singapore, said: 'In the old days both animals were listed as common. They numbered in the comfortable thousands.' Fewer than 20 Banded Leaf Monkeys and no more than four squirrels still live in what is left of the tiny island nation's forests. Their likely extinction will mean the end of the last animal sub-species found only in Singapore.

A representative from Singapore's National Parks Board said the country is working with local groups to study and protect the animals but with only three percent of the island set aside for parks, efforts to breed the animals in captivity and reintroduce them to the forests will fail, Ng said. 'Even if you do bring them back in the zoo, what do you do? You can't release them back into the wild because there's so little of it, it's the price of urbanisation,' he added.

South Korea

Estuary development plan blocked

At last a good news story from South Korea: In order to conserve waterbird populations, the expert body of the National Natural Monuments Committee has announced its opposition to the construction of the proposed massive Miyeonji Road Bridge across the Nakdong estuary, Busan. The Committee's announcement effectively blocks the plan and requires Busan City to develop a better alternative for solving

traffic problems. The whole area is vitally important to a large population of non-breeding Taiga Bean Geese *Anser (fabalis) middendorffi* and up to 3,000 swans, as well as significant numbers of shorebirds, gulls (including Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*) and even occasional groups of cranes.

The conservation of these flats creates excellent opportunities for biodiversity maintenance, environmental education and environmental public awareness. It also reveals the growing understanding of the value of wetlands and waterbirds in Korea, by the wider community.

Source: *Wetlands and Birds Korea*, www.wbk.or.kr, November 22, 2001

Sri Lanka

Annaiwilundawa Sanctuary receives Ramsar status

The Annaiwilundawa Sanctuary covers an area of more than 1,397 ha in Northwestern Province and has recently been declared as Sri Lanka's second Ramsar site. A report submitted to the Department of Wildlife Conservation on an Avifaunal Survey of Annaiwilundawa was instrumental in this declaration. The study was partly funded by the Oriental Bird Club with a grant of £300 and was carried out between November 1992 and April 1994 by T.W. Hoffmann, Upali Ekanayake and Deepal Warakagoda of Ceylon Bird Club.

During the survey, 143 species of birds were recorded, including 19 species of waterfowl, shorebirds and

seabirds. The habitat qualified for Ramsar status due to the numbers of wintering Garganey *Anas querquedula* although Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* also occur in large numbers. This comparatively small and easily accessible area which holds three endemics, namely Sri Lanka Junglefowl *Gallus lafayettii*, Crimson-fronted Barbet *Megalaima rubricapilla* and Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros gingalensis* is undoubtedly an area of national and international importance.

Source: *Daily News*, November 21, 2001.

New E-mail newsletter

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne has launched a new E-mail newsletter for all those interested in Sri Lankan birds and wildlife. He describes SRI LANKA WILDLIFE NEWS as an ad-hoc E-mail of birding and wildlife events, sightings and short notes of interest to birders, photographers and conservationists.

To receive a copy, please E-mail gehan@jetwing.lk with 'Subscribe Wildlife News' in the subject header. The highlight in April's newsletter was an account of the first authenticated record of Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* for Sri Lanka, a bird trapped and ringed at Yala.

Source: *Sri Lanka Wildlife News*, April 12, 2002

Thailand

Chinese dredging threat to Mekong River

China is apparently pushing for clearance of islets along the Mekong River in order to facilitate navigation between

Simao in Yunnan and Chiang Khong in Chiang Rai Province, northern Thailand. It has contributed about 200 million baht (approx. GBP 3.3m) for clearing the river and plans to begin operating vessels with a 300-tonne load capacity in 2003.

Needless to say, this would be devastating for birds since the river's islands and sandbars support internationally important populations of breeding Small Pratincoles *Glareola lactea*, River Lapwings *Vanellus duvaucelli* and Jerdon's Bushchats *Saxicola jerdoni* – and the region's last few breeding pairs of Great Thick-knees *Esacus recurvirostris*, River Terns *Sterna aurantia* and Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda*, while the islets around Chiang Saen also support major wintering concentrations of shorebirds and wildfowl.

Any change to the balance of the river flow could also have major repercussions for the newly-described Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae* that breeds downstream along the Cambodian stretch of the river. (See OBC Bulletin 34 pp56–59)

According to Tao Xin Wah, President of Xishaungbanna Chamber of Commerce in China, 'Good co-operation between the four countries could solve any environmental problems.'

China's past environmental record, for example the construction of the Three Gorges dam on the Yangtse River, does not inspire confidence.

Source: BCST Newsletter, March 2002

Another oil spill in the Gulf of Thailand

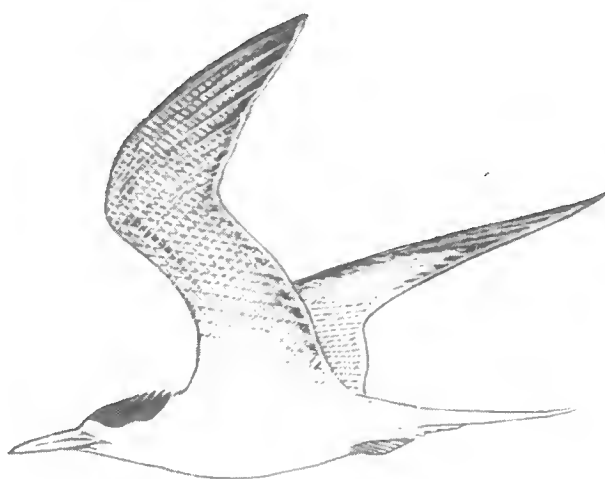
Over 100,000 litres of crude oil was spilled in the Gulf of Thailand from a Panamanian-registered tanker, the *Eastern Fortitude*, in mid-January. This is the latest incident in a long and dismaying history of pollution incidents along the eastern seaboard which supports some of Thailand's last turtle beaches and rocky islets where terns nest.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* and Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* were still present off Satthahip up to the early 1970s, while a few pairs of Bridled *Sterna anaethetus*, Black-naped *S. sumatrana* and Roseate Terns *S. dougalli* – and perhaps Great Crested Terns *S. bergii* too – still nested off Ko Samet, Rayong into the early 1980s.

Source: BCST Newsletter, March 2002

Golf course plan would put a hole in three nations

And staying with major cross-border projects in northern Thailand....The Thai Cabinet has agreed in principle to the development of the 'Emerald Triangle', an area bordering Ubon Ratchathani adjacent to Laos and Cambodia, into a tourist attraction with a golf course. The feasibility of the project will be studied at a site in Phoo Jong Nayoi National Park. This is one of the last



Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* by Craig Robson

refuges of White-winged Ducks *Cairina scutulata* in Thailand.

Vishanu Khrueangam, secretary general to the Cabinet, said the Tourism Authority of Thailand has suggested that the development of a high-quality golf course in the northeast would greatly help to promote tourism and the area could also be used as a venue to enhance the country's bilateral relationships with Cambodia and Laos.

Source: *The Nation*, December 26, 2001

Dam threat to wildlife sanctuary

The Irrigation Department has proposed to build two dams in Khao Soi Dao wildlife sanctuary, putting 4,000 rai (6.4 square kilometres) of protected forest land under water. The cost of building the two dams is estimated at 2.806 billion baht (approx. GBP 46.8 m).

Irrigation officials said no environmental impact assessment study was needed because they were medium-sized projects. However, Theera Wongcharoen, Head of the Chanthaburi civic group said: 'To prevent floods and water shortages, we have to protect the forests, not destroy them by building

reservoirs.....If the agencies concerned go ahead with the projects local people would stage mass protests against them'.

Preecha Ratanaporn, head of the Wildlife Conservation Division, said the Forestry Department had no plan to allow the dam construction and had rejected a similar request in 1999 because of adverse ecological effects. Another forestry officer, who declined to be named, said the department had recently been asked to reconsider its decision.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, January 5, 2002

Thailand may face trade bans over illegal wildlife trade

Thailand could again face trade barriers unless it acts against illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. The warning was issued during discussions on controlling illegal wildlife trade, organised by the Danish government and World Wildlife Fund Thailand (WWF).

Fauna and flora trade bans cost the country two billion baht (approx. GBP 33.33 m) a year the last time they were imposed. Thailand is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Other member countries could again take retaliatory action unless the country cleans up its act.

Thailand remains one of South-East Asia's main gateways for smuggling of wild animals and products to other countries. WWF believed illegal wild products formed the third biggest illicit market in the region, after arms and



Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* by Dave Showler

drugs. Illegal products valued at 200 million baht (approx. GBP 3.33 m) had been seized in Thailand in the past six months.

Source: *Bangkok Post*
November 30, 2001

Mountain Peacock Pheasant in Thailand?

A tail feather, thought to be from a Mountain Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron inopinatum* was discovered recently in the mountains of Yala Province, Thailand. The species, classified as Vulnerable by Birdlife International was thought to be endemic to central Peninsular Malaysia.

Source: *Oriental Birding newsgroup*

Changing regime at Royal Forestry Department?

Two news stories within a week expose the tensions at the top of the ministry charged with protecting Thailand's natural environment. This was in the *Bangkok Post* on April 22, 2001:

Stress on profit, not preservation

The Natural Resources and Environment Ministry will focus more on methods to exploit the country's natural resources for economic gain than on preservation, Praphat Panyachatrak, the deputy agriculture minister, said yesterday. 'Conservation does not simply mean preservation, it also involves the use of natural resources to optimum effect,' said Mr Praphat at a seminar organised by Kasetsart University's faculty of forestry.

He also criticised the agency for placing 'too much emphasis on measures to suppress logging, while always putting the wrong man in the wrong job.' But the restructuring of the Royal Forestry Department will not see its head, Plodprasop Suraswadi, removed just yet, as the *Bangkok Post* reported on April 30, 2001:

Plodprasop stays on until next reshuffle

Plodprasop Suraswadi will stay on as forestry chief until the next bureaucratic reshuffle in October. Cabinet's decision in March to transfer Mr Plodprasop to become a deputy permanent secretary of agriculture would be delayed until an examination of petitions against the order was completed.

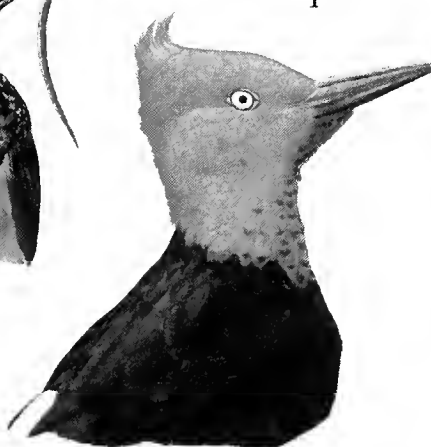
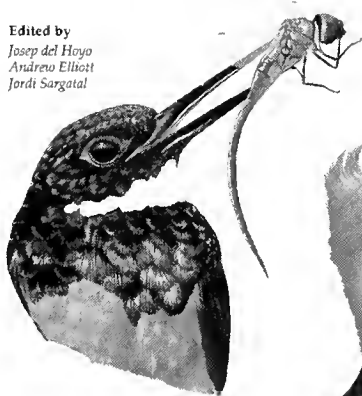
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New Address

Birding in Central Asia: an introduction to Mongolia

Thinking of Mongolia brings impressions of vast endless grasslands to mind. But the country has much more to offer: lush taiga in the north, a mosaic of steppe and coniferous forests in the north and centre, endless seas of grass in the east and dry desert-steppe and desert in the south. In addition, there are several mountain ranges with sub-alpine and alpine habitats at higher altitudes and many wetlands. Twice a year, millions of migrating birds cross the country, which lies at the intersection of the Central Palaearctic and the East Asian-Australasian flyways. Mongolia is rarely on the itinerary of birdwatchers, despite being a country with fantastic landscapes – including some of the last true wilderness areas in Asia, a great bird life and very friendly, hospitable people.

(At the author's request, we have retained a number of English names of species featured in this article which differ from those in *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* by Inskipp, Lindsay and Duckworth – Eds)

Some facts about Mongolia

Mongolia (known historically as 'Outer Mongolia' and called 'Mongolian People's Republic' between 1924 and 1992) is a large upland country in northern Central Asia, lying between eastern Siberia and northern China. It is 2,400 km across from east to west and is c 1,250 km from north to south at its widest point. It covers an area of 1,564,100 km² and in 1998 had a population of 2.4 million people (1.5 inhabitants/km²), with over half-a-million living in the capital Ulaanbaatar alone.¹ The country is mountainous, with about 60% of the surface lying between 1,000–2,000 m a.s.l. and just 15% below 1,000 m.²

Mongolia contains a great array of natural habitats and associated flora and fauna. Moving just a few hundred kilometres from north to south, the landscape changes from the forested mountains of the southern reaches of the Siberian taiga to the barren Gobi desert. From west to east, the landscape changes from mountainous terrain to vast plains. The main vegetation zones encompass mountain taiga (4% of the projected surface area), the alpine belt (3%), forest steppe (mountain forest steppe, 25%), dry steppe (26%), desert steppe (semi-desert, 27%), and desert (15%).³ Despite its low rainfall, Mongolia is rich in water resources, with approximately 1.5 million

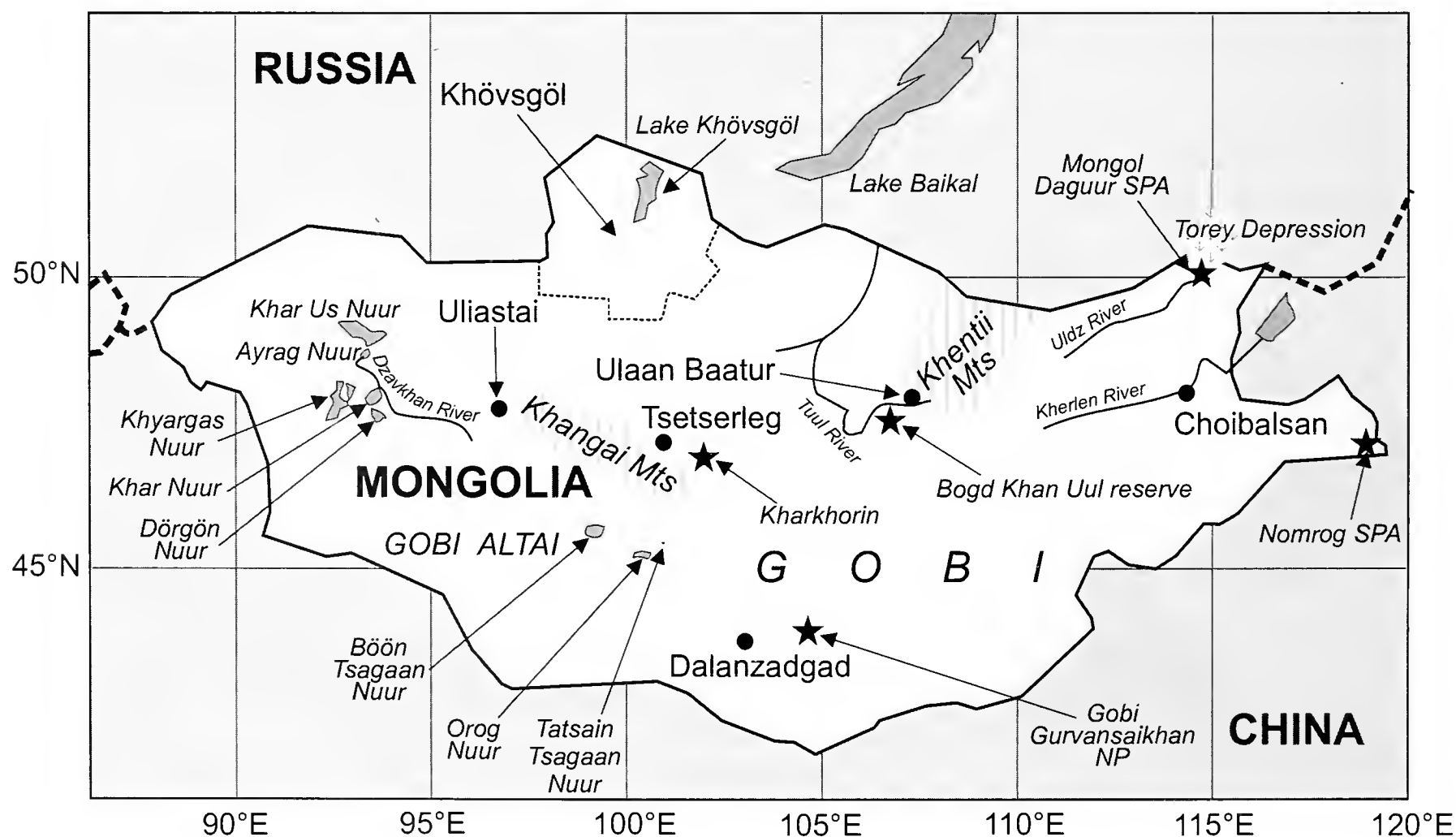


Figure 1. Map of Mongolia showing location of sites mentioned in the text.

ha of standing water bodies – both freshwater and saline, and 50,000 km of rivers.⁴

The climate is markedly continental, with severe winters, large diurnal and annual variations in temperature, low relative humidity and low precipitation, of which approximately 70% falls during the summer. The amount of precipitation ranges from around 50 mm/year in parts of the south to over 400 mm/year in some northern mountains. The average number of days with snow cover each year increases from 60 to 70 in the south to around 170 in the north.⁵

Avifauna

Mongolia's fauna represents a mixture of taxa from the Siberian taiga, the Eurasian steppes and the deserts of Central Asia. The latest published overview on birds gave a total of 415 species for the country in 1991.⁶ The national bird list is growing constantly, with recent additions of such rarities as Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*⁷ and Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*⁸ for example. Possible new breeding species have been discovered in recent years, including Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* in northernmost Mongolia⁹ and Pale-legged Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tenellipes* near Ulaanbaatar.¹⁰ To date, c. 445–450 species (numbers varying according to taxonomic view and to the acceptance/rejection of a number of rarity records), including over 300 breeding species, have been recorded.¹¹ While the bird diversity is rather low for such a large country, several groups are represented by a fair number of species, e.g. cranes (6 species), raptors (39), waders (55), owls (12), leaf warblers (12) and buntings (22), to name but a few groups. Contrary to general opinion^{12,13} the author regards the globally threatened Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* (no recent records from Kazakhstan and Russia)¹² and Kozlov's Accentor *Prunella koslowi*¹⁴ as breeding species endemic to Mongolia.

BirdLife International lists 18 globally threatened, one conservation dependent and eight near threatened species for Mongolia,¹² of which Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*, White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*, Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, and Relict Gull *Larus relictus* occur in globally important breeding populations.¹¹

Threats and Conservation

Despite its very low human population density, several factors have a severe impact on the natural environment in Mongolia, the most serious

probably being overgrazing by livestock. Many Mongolians are still nomads and kept almost 33 million head of livestock (sheep, goat, cattle, horse, and camel) in 1998.¹ Other threats include unplanned use and over-exploitation of natural resources, resulting in desertification, land degradation, and habitat loss; a growing number of steppe fires (mostly human-induced), which often spread into woodlands, forests and reedbeds; increasing infrastructure development, including construction of new railroads (planned) and roads; oil exploitation; and, to a lesser extent, poaching of wildlife, including the illegal capture of the still common Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* for falconry in the Middle East. Recently there have been proposals to suspend the conservation status granted for protected areas or parts of them, to allow mining and road construction.

The percentage of the country set aside for nature reserves increased from 0.13% in 1967 to 13.1% (=20,5 million ha, 48 protected areas) in 2000, with a target to reach 30% between 2011 and 2030.¹⁵ However, several protected areas exist only on paper or suffer from inadequate funding, together with poor enforcement of environmental legislation. The difficulties associated with the economic transition occurring in Mongolia mean that government agencies have few financial resources for biodiversity conservation or for enhancing environmental protection and management of existing protected areas.

Some tips for visiting birdwatchers

Despite the fact that temperatures drop regularly to below minus 20° C and sometimes to minus 50° C. E. V. Kozlova¹⁶ recorded a total of 74 bird species in northern Mongolia in winter in the 1920s. However, most visiting birdwatchers will probably prefer the more pleasant warm season (late May to mid September).

A number of tour companies offer tailor-made birding trips to Mongolia but it is also possible to go on your own. A visa for one month can be obtained without invitation. Hiring a 4-wheel drive vehicle is almost essential as there is little public transport and many good sites are rather remote. A car plus driver costs around 0.5 US\$ per kilometre, including fuel. All provincial capitals can be reached by local flights from Ulaanbaatar. Accommodation is scarce, so be prepared to camp out. Tents can be pitched almost everywhere, caution must be taken only close to larger settlements and towns. Tips and hints on local travel can be found in various travel guide books, e.g. the reasonably good Lonely Planet guide published recently,¹⁷ and are not dealt with

further here. Visitors should always remember that infrastructure is generally underdeveloped. A trip away from the immediate vicinity of Ulaanbaatar needs careful planning and in remoter parts adequate safety measures. Make sure to carry enough water, tools for the car (something drivers don't necessarily think of!) and protective clothing (blizzards can occur even in summer!). A hand-held GPS (Global Positioning System)¹⁸ will provide extra security and is worth carrying in the field for exact documentation of observation sites, especially as there are often no obvious landmarks, and good maps are difficult to obtain.

Birding regions

Birdwatching can be rewarding almost everywhere in Mongolia. Until recently, ornithological research was scant in many areas, especially in the far west and far east of the country. By way of basic information, a selection of a few better-known sites, and some rarely visited areas is presented here (see Fig. 1 for location of sites mentioned in the text). The sites are so extensive that detailed directions cannot be given.

Ulaanbaatar and the Khentii Mountains

The starting point for any trip will be Ulaanbaatar (UB). The Nairamdal Park in the city centre and the Tuul (Tola) river just at the southern edge of town are always good for an early morning stroll. Species which can be seen include Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica*, Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*, Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*, Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*, Richard's Pipit *A. richardi*, Azure Tit *Parus cyannus*, White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*, Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus*, Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* and Meadow Bunting *E. cioides*. Often a good selection of East Siberian migrants turn up here during the migration seasons.

The Bogd Khan Uul reserve (41,651 ha), south of town, is the southernmost extent of the Khentii mountain taiga, and is covered by steppe on the lower reaches, giving way to forest-steppe, and finally to boulder fields. More than 120 species of birds have been recorded, including Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*, Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*, Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*, Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, and Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*. In winter, Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa* and Pallas's Rosefinch *Carpodacus roseus* have been observed in some numbers here.

Just to the west of town, near the airport, are some gravel ponds. This is an area of wetlands and grassland near the Tuul river where one can easily see many of the common species. In late summer/early autumn, hundreds of Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* congregate here.

Gorkhi-Terelj National Park (293,168 ha), 54 km by paved road from UB, borders the Khan Khentii Strictly Protected Area (1.2 million ha) and includes the southern Khentii mountain range. The park offers a good variety of habitats with coniferous forest on slopes, rocky outcrops, rich meadows, small streams bordered by broadleaved woodland, and mature riparian poplar forests along the Tuul river. The bird fauna is similar to that of Bogd Khan Uul but more species have been recorded. Amongst the many species which may well be encountered are Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*, Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*, Two-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides plumbeitarsus*, Chinese Bush Warbler *Bradypterus tacsanowskii*, Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*, Asian Brown Flycatcher *M. dauurica* and the rare Spotted Capercaillie *Tetrao parvirostris*.

Khangai Mountains

The Khangai Mountains in central-western Mongolia are often crossed on the way to areas in the south and west of the country. Driving south from UB, Upland Buzzards *Buteo hemilasius* and Cinereous Vultures can be encountered with increasing frequency. The steppe lakes of the region don't hold such large numbers of waterbirds as wetlands in the east and west of the country but are excellent to see a good selection of waterbirds, including breeding Black-throated Divers *Gavia arctica* and Spot-billed Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha*.

The freshwater steppe lake, Ogii Nuur, near the road between UB and Tsetserleg is a fairly accessible rich wetland (c. 400 km west of UB). Regular species include White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Swan Goose and Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Asian Dowitcher has been seen displaying here and there are several records of Pallas's Fish Eagle, White-naped Crane (probably breeding) and Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*.

Kharkhorin (Karakorum), the Mongol capital in the 13th and 14th centuries, lies c. 370 km to the south-west of Ulaanbaatar. A trip here can easily be combined with a visit to Ogii Nuur or the Gobi Lakes. Close to Kharkhorin, the largest agricultural area in Mongolia supports large congregations of up to 7,500 Demoiselle Cranes

Grus virgo and 5,000 Ruddy Shelducks in autumn (September). Other sought-after species like Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica* and Blyth's Pipit are regulars in the area. Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* has been recorded breeding in the buildings of the nearby Buddhist monastery of Erdene-Zuu.

The highest mountain of the Khangai, Otgon Tenger (4,021 m), near the town of Uliastai is home to the little-known Hodgson's Bushchat which occurs in subalpine meadows near streams, in areas with many gorges, rocky outcrops and scattered boulders, at an altitude of 2,430–2,600 m,¹² where it shares habitat with Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana* and other high-altitude species.

Khövsgöl

Some of the finest forest in Mongolia can be found near Lake Khövsgöl (2,760 km², altitude 1,645 m, National Park 838,070 ha) in the north of the country. This is the smaller sister of Lake Baikal (c 200 km to the north-east) with which it shares many similarities in origin, flora and fauna. The forest avifauna is comparable to that of the Khentii mountains. The best birdwatching areas lie in the southern half of the western shore where there are several lagoons and wet meadows, with the taiga almost reaching the shoreline. This combination of habitats supports a wide variety of species (more than 250 recorded). In early/mid June, when the lake is often still frozen, waterbirds concentrate in remarkable numbers on these lagoons, including Horned Grebes *Podiceps auritus* and White-winged Scoters *Melanitta (fusca) stejnegeri*. While waders are rather rare in the area, the forests have good numbers of breeding Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* and marshes near the lake might hold a few breeding pairs of Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*.¹¹ The region is one of the few places in Siberia where Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* and Red-throated Thrush *T. r. ruficollis* have been

recorded breeding alongside each other.¹⁹ Northern Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*, Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*, several species of leaf warbler *Phylloscopus* spp., Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*, Rufous-backed Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronota*, and Daurian Redstart *P. aureus* occur here.

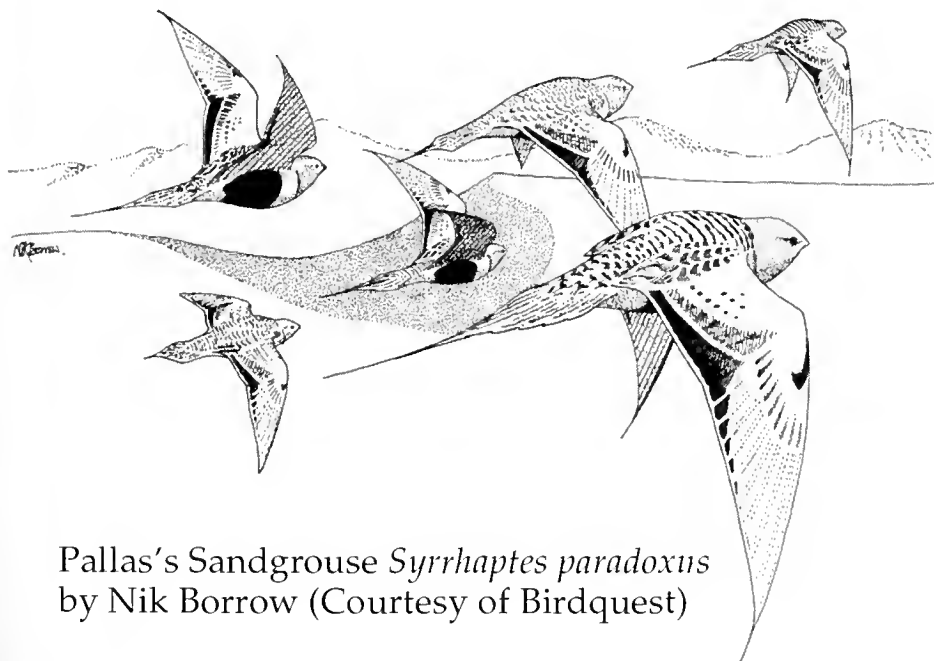
Great Lakes Basin

The Great Lakes Basin in western Mongolia contains some very large lakes: Khyargas Nuur (1,407 km², saline), Ayrag Nuur (143 km², freshwater), Khar Us Nuur (1,852 km², freshwater), Khar Nuur (575 km², freshwater), and Dörgön Nuur (305 km², saline). All lakes hold at least a few breeding pairs of Black-throated Diver, occurring here at the southernmost edge of their Eurasian range. Other characteristic species of the region include Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, Black-tailed Godwit of the eastern subspecies *Limosa. l. melanuroides*, Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*, White-winged and Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* and *C. hybridus*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*, Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis*, and the beautiful white-headed race *leucocephala* of Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

Captions for plates on pages 66–67

All photos by Henry Mix

- 1 Mongolian Ground-jay *Podoces hendersoni*, on rumen on top of a nomad tent, southern Gobi, Mongolia, November 1995
- 2 Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Ayrag Nuur, western Mongolia, June 1995.
- 3 Upland Buzzards *Buteo hemilasius*, main road Ulaanbaatar - Arvaikheer, Mongolia, July 1997.
- 4 Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*, Mongolia.
- 5 Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo* and White-naped Cranes *Grus vipio*, Ulz valley, north-eastern Mongolia, May 1994.
- 6 White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*, Ulz valley, north-eastern Mongolia, May 1994.
- 7 Migrant Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane*, Kherlen valley, north-eastern Mongolia, May 1994.
- 8 Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, southern Gobi, Mongolia, June 1996.
- 9 Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Orchon river, eastern Khangai, Mongolia, June 1994.
- 10 Pallas's Gulls *Larus ichthyaetus* at colony, Dörgön Nuur, western Mongolia, June 1995.



Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* by Nik Borrow (Courtesy of Birdquest)

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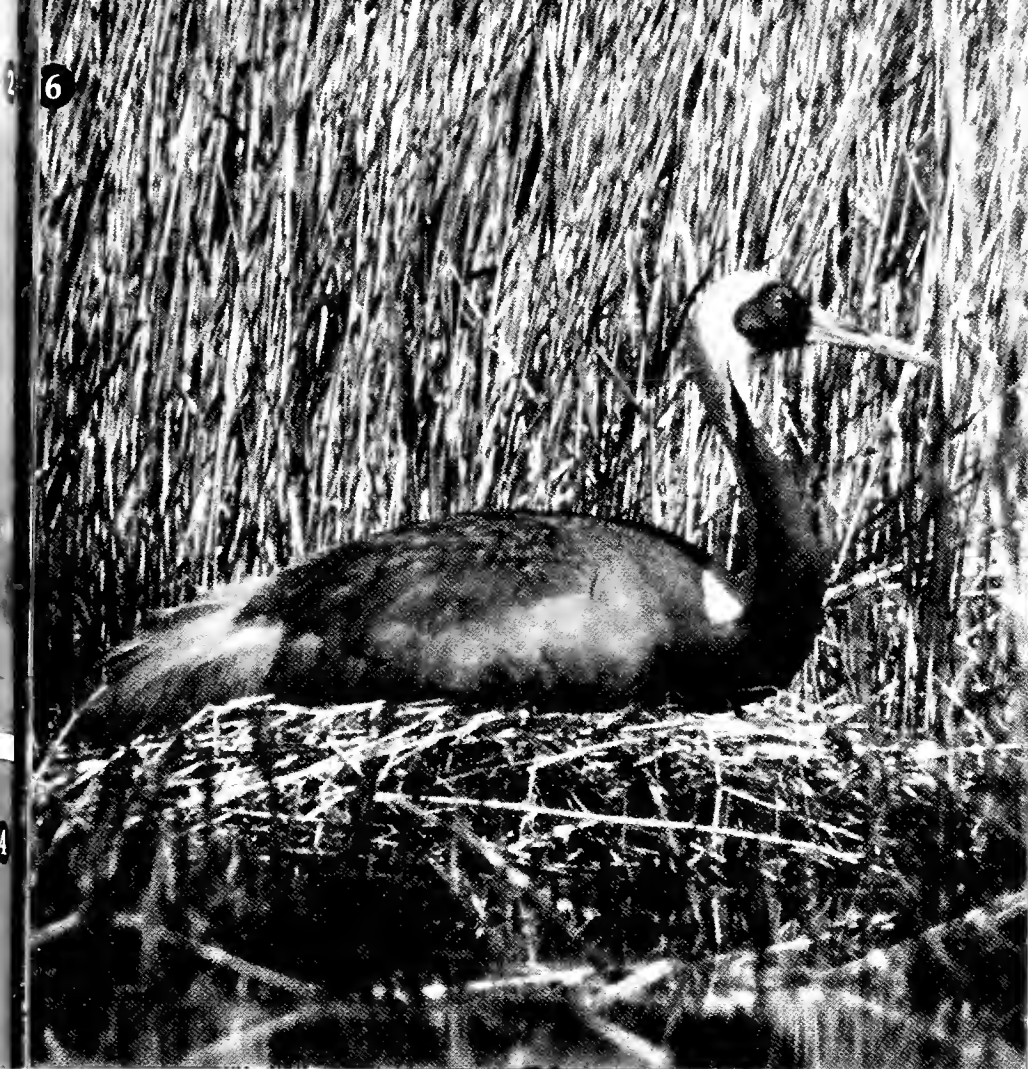


*Production of this double colour plate
has been generously sponsored by Leica*



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Captions are on page 65



Khar Us Nuur National Park (850,272 ha) has some of the largest reedbeds in Central and Eastern Asia. Characteristic breeding species are Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Bearded Parrotbill *Panurus biarmicus* and the race *pyrrhuloides* of Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* with its thick beak, adapted to crush reed stems when searching for arthropods in winter. A speciality here is the world-wide easternmost population of White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, with a maximum of 238 birds recorded in September 1998.^{12,20} Patches of long grass on dry ground near the lake usually hold a few breeding pairs of Pallas's Bunting *Emberiza pallasii*.

Ayrag Nuur is another important site, being probably the most bird-rich wetland in Mongolia. Especially in late summer and early autumn, tens of thousands of birds use the area as a stop-over site. A wide variety of shorebirds can be observed feeding on exposed mud when water levels are low, especially at the mouth of the river Dzavkhan. For example, Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris accuminata*, Asian Dowitcher and Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* occur, the latter with an impressive maximum of over 7,000 birds in July 1995.¹¹ Waterfowl are plentiful and in particular, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Common Teal *A. crecca* have been recorded in thousands, providing ample food resources for White-tailed and Pallas's Fish Eagles, which are present in dozens in late summer and early autumn. Besides a large colony of Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, the lake holds the last known breeding pairs of Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* in Mongolia.²¹

Bird life similar to that of the Great Lakes Basin can be found at the brackish Gobi Lakes (Böön Tsagaan Nuur, Orog Nuur, Tatsain Tsagaan Nuur and Ulaan Nuur), between the Khangai and Altai. Relict Gull has been reported breeding at Tatsain Tsagaan Nuur, and the lake is the only site in Mongolia where Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* has been recorded several times (in summer).¹¹

Eastern Mongolia

The grasslands of eastern Mongolia are the last large undisturbed steppe ecosystem in the world. Huge herds of Mongolian Gazelle *Procapra gutturosa*, often numbering tens of thousands of animals, still roam in this area. The provincial capital, Choibalsan, 600 km east of UB can be reached by fairly good roads in one and a half

days. Plentiful poplars in the town create an oasis-like effect and during spring the author has seen the town bustling with a plethora of migrants, including hundreds of Taiga Flycatchers *Muscicapa (parva) albicilla*, Siberian Blue Robins *Luscinia cyane* and the occasional White-throated Rock Thrush *Monticola gularis*. The nearby Kherlen river produced surprising observations of species such as Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*, Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* and Von Schrenck's Bittern *Ixobrychus eurhythmus*.¹¹

There are numerous wetlands in eastern Mongolia. The Torey Depression (shared with south-eastern Transbaikalia, Russia) in the northeast, for example, may contain over 1,500 lakes in wet periods.²² Characteristic species include Pied Harrier *Circus melanotus*, Swan Goose, Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Relict Gull, Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*. Small islands on several steppe lakes are home to colonies of Mongolian Gulls *Larus mongolicus*, a species that was regarded as a subspecies of Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans* until recently, but which is undoubtedly genetically and morphologically distinct and should be given specific status.^{23,24} The grasslands provide habitat to thousands of northward bound Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* and, especially in autumn, to large numbers of Little Curlews *Numenius minutus*. The small lake Ikh Tashgai Nuur, with its reedbeds and marshes, is one of the very few localities where Reed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis heudei* occurs and recently Ochre-rumped Bunting *Emberiza yessoensis* has been discovered breeding here.¹¹

Mongol Daguur Strictly Protected Area (103,016 ha) was established to preserve a representative portion of Mongolia's Daurian steppe and its characteristic flora, fauna, landscape, and endangered species. Six species of crane have been recorded: Common Crane *Grus grus* (on passage, probably breeding), Hooded Crane *G. monacha* (common on passage, especially in autumn), White-naped Crane (fairly common breeding visitor), Red-crowned Crane *G. japonensis* (very rare visitor), Siberian Crane (rare non-breeding summer visitor and passage migrant), and Demoiselle Crane (common breeding visitor). The protected area is especially known for its high density of nesting White-naped Cranes. The Uldz River (which flows through the southern part) and the nearby Onon and Khukh rivers support one of the largest breeding populations of this species in the world.

Nomrog Strictly Protected Area (311,205 ha) covers the remote and uninhabited far eastern tip of Mongolia and includes the westernmost end of the Da Hinggan mountain range, which extends into Mongolia from Manchuria, China. As it is situated near the border, foreigners require a special permit to visit this area. The region is relatively wet and one-fifth of the area is forested, primarily by small groves of Scotch pine, white birch and willow. Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia* and Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, inhabiting riparian forest, reach the westernmost limit of their range here.

Gobi and Gobi Altai

Travel to desert regions requires expedition-like logistics and remoter parts are better explored with two 4-wheel drive vehicles for safety reasons. Key species to be seen in the Gobi include McQueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueeni*, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Mongolian Ground-jay *Podoces hendersoni*, Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*, Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* and Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri*.

A good base for a desert tour is the well-known Gobi tourist camp near the regional capital, Dalanzadgad. Poplars were planted here in 1978 in the otherwise treeless landscape. They attract often large numbers of migrants such as Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*, Amur Falcon, Lesser Kestrel and various passerines. Recent first records for Mongolia from this site include Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* and Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*.⁷ Père David's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana* and both Greater Sand Plover and Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* breed in the vicinity of the camp.

Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park (2,694,737 ha), situated west of Dalanzadgad, encompasses a series of ridges and valleys that make up the eastern end of the Gobi Altai mountains. Surrounded by low plains, the mountains rise to 2,200–2,600 m. The park, which extends for more than 380 km from east to west, lies at the northern edge of the Gobi desert but at higher elevations includes desert-steppe and steppe. The park's landscape is extremely varied, with rocky and sandy desert plains, precipitous cliffs and ravines, salt pans, and oases. Over 240 bird species occur in the area. Yolyn Am (Vulture Valley) – the name is based on the abundant occurrence of Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus* and Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* – is on the itinerary of almost all visiting birdwatchers. Several species of rosefinch

Carpodacus spp., Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus*, Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*, White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*, Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*, Kozlov's Accentor, Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*, and Mongolian Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus* breed in the valley. A few years ago a birdwatching group even saw the elusive Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia* at a kill here.

Request for information

The author welcomes any type of information on the birds of Mongolia. Relevant data will be used for various publications and projects, including BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas programme. Any contribution will be acknowledged by letter and in print.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friends, Bazarsad Chimed-Ochir, Andrew Laurie, Henry Mix, Richard P. Reading and N. Tseveenmyadag, who made my travels in Mongolia possible and were always good companions in the field. Henry Mix provided the photographs for the colour plates and the cover. Helen Ferguson kindly made constructive editorial comments on an early draft of the paper.

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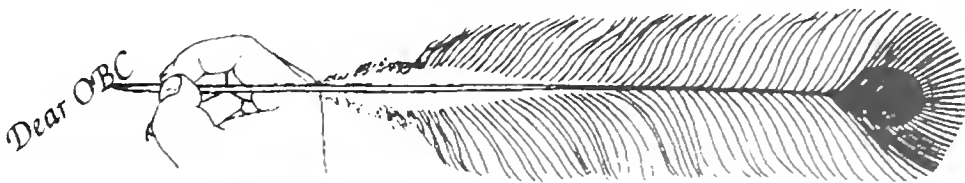
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Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* by Craig Robson (Courtesy of Birdquest)

To the Editor



Birding in Sessa Orchid Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, India

We visited the Sessa Orchid Sanctuary (27°06'N and 92°31'E, 1230 m) in Arunachal Pradesh, India, from 19–21 March 2001 for a short trip to assist a biodiversity research programme organised by ATREE, Eastern Himalaya Programme for the students and researchers of Arunachal University and NERIST (North East Regional Institute for Science and Technology). During our stay in the Sanctuary we observed two Red Data Book species of bird: Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* and Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*.

The hornbill was observed twice during our four brief birding spells spread over three days. It was seen to fly from one hill to another and also observed closely when perched on a fig tree. However, the nuthatch was recorded only once, during the afternoon of 20 March 2001. It was observed clambering about branches of a small leafless tree of about 15 m DBH (diameter at breast height) at about five metres above the ground. Although the bird was only watched for half a minute, it was long enough to identify this unique bird before its wings could leave any doubt in our minds. Very little is known about this bird.

During the short trip we saw 59 species of bird in 16 man-hours, including two RDB*, 12 BRS* and one RRS* species (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: List of notable birds seen in and around Sessa Orchid Sanctuary during 19–21 March 2001.

Common Name	Scientific Name	RDB/RRS/BRS
Beautiful Nuthatch	<i>Sitta formosa</i>	RDB, BRS
Black-throated Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga saturata</i>	BRS
Black-throated Tit	<i>Aegithalos leucogenys</i>	BRS
Blue throated Barbet	<i>Megalamia asiatica</i>	BRS
Chestnut-headed Tesia	<i>Tesia castanecornata</i>	BRS
Crow-billed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus annectans</i>	BRS
Grey-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>	BRS
Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	BRS
Rufous-necked Hornbill	<i>Aceros nipalensis</i>	RDB, BRS
Small Niltava	<i>Niltava macgrigoriae</i>	BRS
Streaked Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	BRS
Streak-throated Barwing	<i>Actinodura waldeni</i>	RRS
Sultan Tit	<i>Melanochlora sultanea</i>	BRS

*RDB= Red Data Book species, BRS= Biome Restricted species, RRS= Restricted-Range species

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Unusual plumage of Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*

On 16 June 1996 at Jul Zhai Gou, Sichuan, China, my attention was drawn to a breeding pair of Plumbeous Water Redstarts *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* (see page 74 for photographs of this bird) by a strikingly unusual plumage feature exhibited by the male. From a distance the bird appeared to have an entirely creamy-coloured tail.

The following morning I returned to the site where I found a secluded spot from which to watch and photograph the pair at close range. The tail feathers of the male, which were heavily abraded, showed no trace of the red so characteristic of normal birds. Instead, the upperside of the tail was creamy-white, with the central retrices (probably the centre four) pale buff at the tips, gradually becoming paler buff and merging into creamy-white approximately halfway down the feathers. The uppertail-coverts were also creamy-white but although not noticed in the field, photographs reveal that the feathers forming the upper border were in fact pale buff. The underside of the tail feathers and the undertail-coverts were pale buff, with the central (four?) retrices a slightly but distinctly, darker orange-buff. The colour of the underside of the retrices became paler from tip to base. In all other respects the plumage was typical of an adult male.

I can find no reference to any previous records of a similar plumage abnormality in Plumbeous Water Redstarts.

I am grateful to Paul J. Leader for his helpful comments on the initial draft of this note.

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Gurney's Pitta – captive breeding as a last chance?

In the last issue of the OBC Bulletin (34: 66-67), Johannes Erritzoe argued strongly for some sort of hands-on management in order to save the critically endangered Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* from imminent extinction – a situation that is clear and not a matter of debate between specialists anymore. Nigel Collar replied in the same issue, indicating that OBC will continue its dialogue with the Thai Royal Forest Department (RFD) in order to save Khao Nor Chuchi (KNC), a patch of

forest where the last known viable population of this species occurs.

From our experience of breeding pittas at Vogelpark Walsrode in Germany, and taking into consideration the precarious situation of Gurney's Pitta, I strongly support Erritzoe's statement. If we take a realistic view of the situation in Thailand, this single last remaining forest site never really supported a viable population: numbers dwindled from approx. 45 pairs in 1986 to just nine in 1997, and even 45 pairs would not guarantee long-term viability if this is the carrying capacity of KNC. *Threatened Birds of the World*,¹ gave the bird a 'continuing rapid decline', which could mean that by the time any political decisions about the protection of its habitat have been made, Gurney's Pitta will already have gone. I do very much appreciate all the efforts of the various conservation agencies but obviously these resource-consuming activities have not been successful. We may soon find ourselves in a situation where too few birds remain for a captive breeding programme, and the possibility of establishing viable wild and captive populations from hands-on management measures decreases with every single bird that dies in KNC.

Erritzoe lists five proposals for serious consideration. However, when discussing these in some detail, he gives too positive a view of breeding pittas in captivity. At Vogelpark Walsrode we have experience with five taxa of pitta, one of which we breed successfully with several pairs now (Banded Pitta *P. guajana*), two of which made unsuccessful breeding attempts (two subspecies of Hooded Pitta *P. sordida*), while the two others have not yet bred. It is true that pittas are relatively easy to acclimatise and that they can be rather long-lived birds; however, for successful breeding, they have very specific needs.

Although several species of pitta have been bred, the zoo community has not yet succeeded in establishing a single species as a sustainable population. However, with our ongoing breeding success in Banded Pittas, we are now very close to this goal. Our hand-rearing experience with Banded Pittas is limited to birds which are taken from the nest at the age of between five and seven days, from when on we have hardly any losses during rearing. After removal of the chicks, the parents almost immediately start to build a new nest and lay eggs, mostly within 20 days. The young pittas, once fledged, cannot be housed together with adult conspecifics as cited by Erritzoe. The adults are territorial and very aggressive so we have to keep the young pittas in

flocks, where they tolerate each other until they moult into adult plumage.

A hands-on management programme for Gurney's Pitta would almost certainly be very successful, if the following measures were realised:

- 1) Establish rearing facilities *in-situ* and an information centre for the public, both near KNC, increasing the importance of this site for the continuing survival of the pitta.
- 2) Collect as many juvenile birds as possible at the age of at least five days from wild nests. The wild birds will probably produce replacement clutches.
- 3) Rear juvenile birds for release on site (perhaps using pitta models for feeding), and for establishment of an *ex-situ* captive colony (Jersey and Walsrode to begin with). The latter could act as a 'reserve pool under total human management'.
- 4) Build a large release aviary on site, and release the young birds after a short period of 'training for the wild'.
- 5) Conduct surveys in southern Burma in order to locate possible sites where Gurney's Pitta still occurs or where the species could be established.
- 6) Identify potential release sites elsewhere in Thailand and in the region in order to establish satellite colonies. This would provide alternatives if KNC cannot be saved.
- 7) Transfer all confiscated Gurney's Pittas from zoos in Thailand into experts' hands, preferably to those institutions playing a leading role in the captive management of the species.

The first and most important aim of such a programme should be to increase the numbers of pittas rapidly, thereby reducing the risk of further loss of genetic diversity as a result of natural mortality and of losing the entire population by a chance catastrophic event.

I am convinced that we still have a chance to save Gurney's Pitta from extinction if action is taken without any further delay. BirdLife International and OBC should take a leading role to implement the extensive hands-on management programme as outlined above, seeking expertise from and involving the zoo community. Political tactics and an idealistic approach to the problem will not be of help anymore.

During the past few years the world has lost, among several others, the Aldabra Warbler *Nesillas aldabrana* and several well-marked island

populations of *Pomarea* monarchs in the Marquesas Islands (Polynesia); a few other species have not been seen in recent years according to *Threatened Birds of the World* and may have gone extinct. Although the conservation community was well aware of the problems involved, not all potentially successful measures within our power have been applied in order to save these birds. Let us hope that the attempts to save Gurney's Pitta will not add another sad story to our record of preserving Earth's biological diversity.

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Captive breeding for Gurney's Pitta: a further comment

It is heartening to know that an institution like Vogelpark Walsrode might be willing to help support a captive-breeding initiative for Gurney's Pitta, given the interest already expressed by Jersey Zoo; and I am grateful to Dieter Rinke for pressing an alternative agenda for the species, which requires us to keep thinking very carefully and clearly about what we are doing. I should emphasise that while the call is for BirdLife International and OBC to take steps with regard to captive breeding, this response simply reflects my views and feelings as Chairman of OBC.

As I wrote in my previous commentary, I do not rule out captive breeding for Gurney's Pitta; but I still do not feel OBC is quite at the point where we should change our policy. Dieter Rinke makes a strong case, but I still see drawbacks.

- (1) He does not deal with my point that a captive breeding programme might have the accidental effect of undermining the existing levels of protection at KNC and hence of causing the species's only known site and habitat to disappear completely.
- (2) I still struggle with the notion that there might be suitable habitat without Gurney's Pitta into which captive-bred birds could be released. There might be such places if certain forested areas had been trapped out, but this has never been the problem: the problem is that the forests have all been cut down, and the species's absence from any remaining forest in the region will almost certainly be due to ecological unsuitability. For all we know the

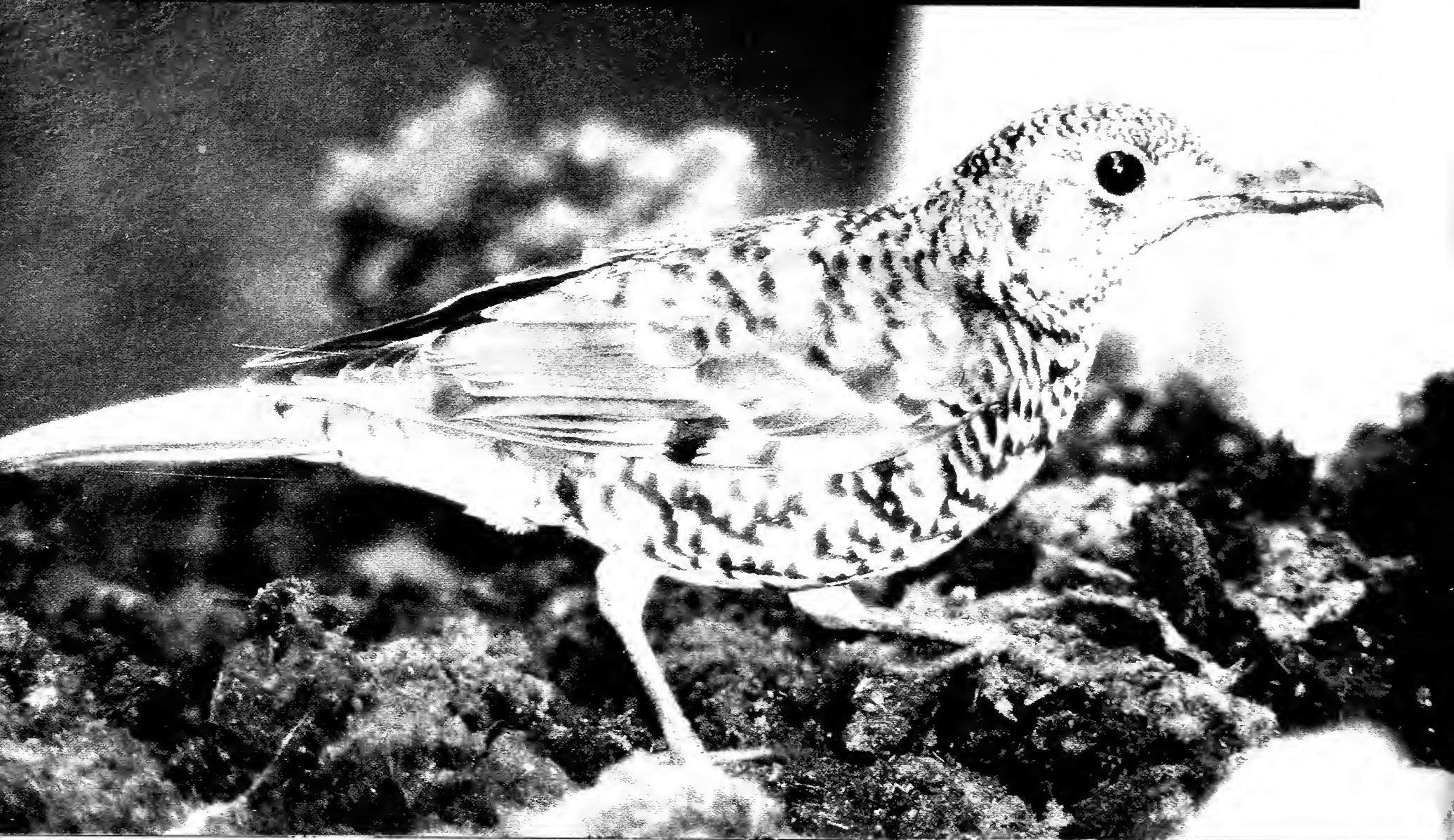
population at KNC might even now be at carrying capacity.

- (3) The extinctions he mentions involved (as did the examples Johannes Erritzoe gave) impacts other than simple habitat loss. The comparison is not therefore appropriate. So far as we know, there is nowhere else for Gurney's Pitta to survive, so we *must* ensure its conservation.
- (4) He acknowledges that the technical capacity to breed pittas sustainably has not yet been fully achieved; it would be important, I think, to have that capacity, well tried and tested, before taking any initiatives with Gurney's.
- (5) "Political tactics and an idealistic approach to the problem will not be of help anymore" is not a comment which adequately reflects what OBC *has* done: we have been principled rather than "political", yet we have been pragmatic rather than idealistic. This year we are paying for the training of a number of guards at KNC as a way of building capacity and commitment, and we are continuing to monitor the population of the species while always pressing the authorities, directly and/or indirectly, to deliver total security to the site.
- (6) The costs and logistics of a captive breeding programme are considerable, necessitating the acquisition and long-term maintenance of high-grade staff, buildings and equipment, and the development of a major new system of procedures and communications. If it is to be done, it *must* be done to the very best of our ability. I have no clear idea of the likely dollar costs of such an enterprise, but high six-figure numbers swim before me as I think about it—sums which, if we only had them, might better be used to buy land and reconstruct habitat.

As I said in response to Johannes Erritzoe, it remains important to keep all options open, and in making this further response to Dieter Rinke I again do not rule out the possibility of turning to zoos such as Jersey and Walsrode, if and when they have the technical and financial resources, for their intervention, especially if the situation seriously deteriorates at KNC. However, again as earlier, I cannot accept the premise that our "resource-consuming activities have not been successful". The years of our active (and actually very cheap and cost-effective) intervention at KNC have coincided with a period of habitat stability there, and just for the moment I think we must continue to work on the assumption that there is a causative link between these two things.

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Photospot: Nilgiri Thrush *Zoothera (dauma) neilgherriensis*



The Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma* complex has received increasing attention from taxonomists in recent years with the result that a number of forms have been elevated to species status. Others still remain possible candidates for treatment as full species pending further research. One of these is the relatively little-known Nilgiri Thrush *Zoothera (dauma) neilgherriensis* which is resident in the hill

forests of southwestern India. This excellent shot, taken by Jijo Matthew at the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, Thattekad, Kerala on 10 January 2000, is apparently the first ever photograph of this shy bird. Very little is known about its song. If anyone has experience of this or knows of any recordings, OBC would be pleased to hear about it. (Text by Krys Kazmierczak).



Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* 17 June 1996, Jiu Zhai Gou, Sichuan, China. Both photos by Ray Tipper (see page 71)

Little-known Oriental bird

Bornean Bristlehead *Pityriasis gymnocephala*



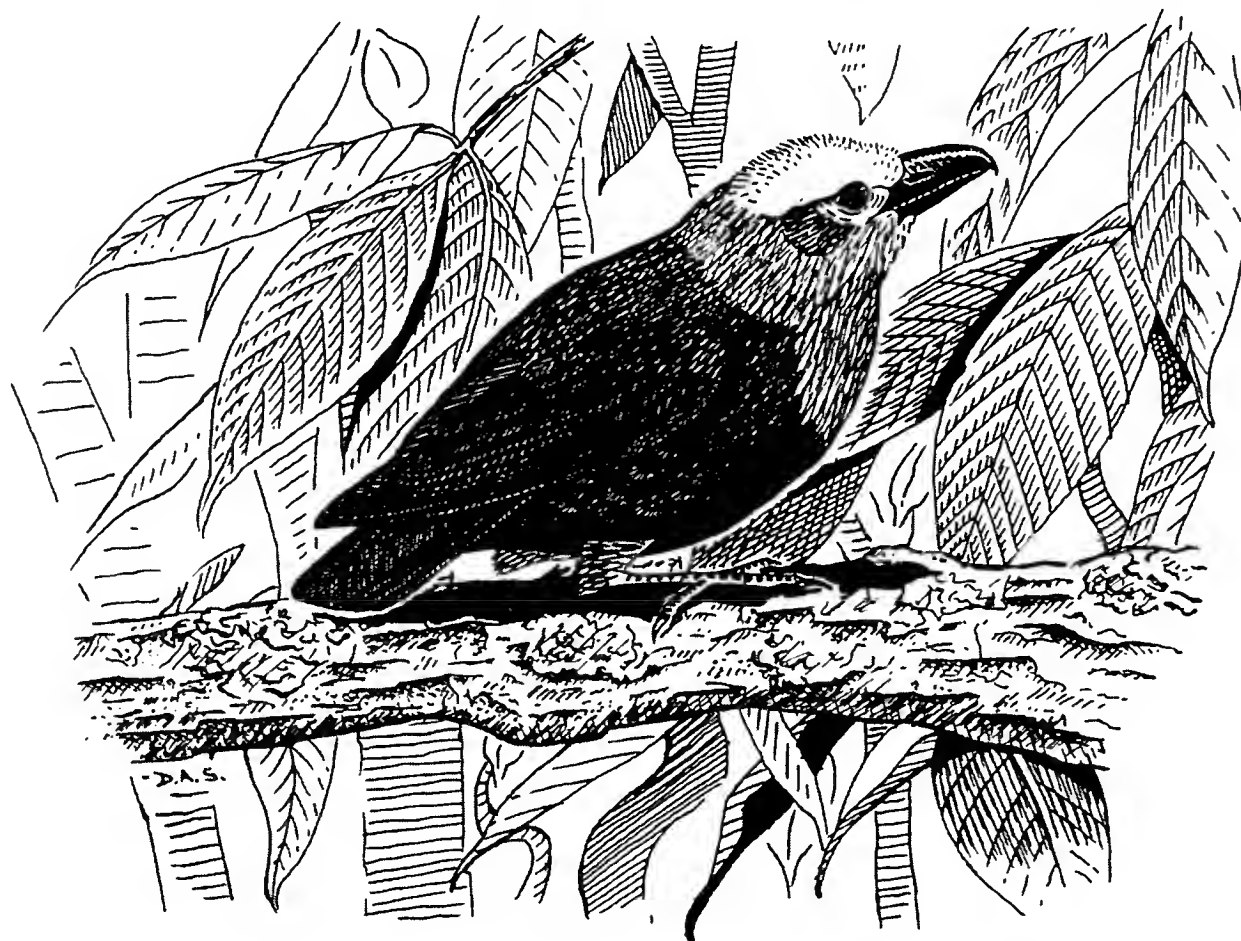
The Bornean Bristlehead *Pityriasis gymnocephala* is endemic to the lowland forests of Borneo. It has been classified as Near Threatened¹ by BirdLife International based on its restricted range and the disappearance of its lowland forest habitat. The Bornean Bristlehead is a medium-sized (c. 25 cm) bird whose distinctive features are its massive hooked black bill and the short, yellowish to orange outgrowths of skin (3–4 mm long) on the crown which give the bird its English name. Other prominent features are its red face, throat, neck and thighs. The rest of the plumage is blackish, although in flight a white patch is visible in the wing. The sexes differ in that the female has red spots on the flanks, which are reduced or absent in the male. Juveniles have black rather than red thighs and red rather than grey ear coverts, and have fewer red feathers on the head and breast. In addition, the eye-ring is red and the head 'bristles' are undeveloped.

The phylogenetic relationships of the species, supported by genetic evidence² place it as a close relative of the Australian Cracticids (magpies and butcherbirds) of the genera *Cracticus*, *Gymnorhina* and *Strepera*. Others³ have placed the species within an enlarged Corvidae, with the Bristlehead in the tribe Artamini alongside

Australian Butcherbirds (*Cracticus*), Australasian Magpie (*Gymnorhina*), Currawongs (*Strepera*), Woodswallows (*Artamus*), and Peltops (*Peltops*).

The species is widespread in Borneo from 0–600 m, but has also been reported at 1000–1200 m from Maliau, Sabah.⁴ Witt & Sheldon⁵ listed 62 sites from which the species had been recorded, to which the following can now be added; Lambir Hills National Park (Sarawak),¹¹ Lingga (Sarawak), Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary (Sarawak), Tawau Hills National Park (Sabah), Ulu Temburong (Brunei), and Sepipong Reserve (Brunei). It is described as common in the secondary and peat swamp forests of southern Brunei, and as particularly common in the Anduki Forest Reserve (Brunei).⁵ Generally speaking though, the Bristlehead is an uncommon species, for example, in the Danum Valley, one of its strongholds, six days of dawn to dusk observation between 2–8 November 1998 resulted in the sighting of one group of six birds and another of two birds (JN). Observations in Similajau during 1986 and 1995 suggest that the species is patchily distributed in the park.⁷ It is probable that groups range over a wide area but that during breeding these movements are more localised.





Bornean Bristlehead *Pityriasis gymnocephala* by Dave Showler

Although considered a bird of primary forest, the Bristlehead is found in a range of wooded habitats including disturbed primary forest, upland *kerangas*, coniferous forest, *Shorea albida* peat swamp, and degraded coastal swamp forest (DM). Bristleheads were observed by Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology (WFVZ) near Gomantong caves (Sabah) in old logged forest that had been severely burned during the El Niño drought. They have also been observed in *Acacia* groves adjacent to primary forest at Sepilok (Sabah) (KI). At Selipong Reserve (Brunei Bay), flocks have been reported from a large area of unspoilt mangrove. They are frequently recorded in secondary or partially logged forest, in clearings, along forest edge and roadsides, possibly due to a higher abundance of invertebrates in these locations. Their occurrence in the Danum Valley, Sarawak, is unpredictable, suggesting that birds may wander large distances in search of food, and prolonged observations of a group of 3–6 birds at distance of 700–800 m has suggested this.⁷ However, its appearance in the Danum Valley has been described as seasonal, indicating that some altitudinal movement may occur.

Very little appears to be known of the breeding habits of the species. Flocks of Bristleheads have been observed carrying nesting material in May 1982 at Brumas (Sabah). A female collected at Brumas (Sabah) on 18 May 1982 had enlarged ova and ruptured ovarian follicles suggesting recent egg laying. Specimens collected at Sapagaya (Sabah) on 5 August 1983 and at Quoin Hill (Sabah) on 4 October 1962 had oviduct eggs, and

the latter bird also had a well-defined brood patch.⁵ An egg, measuring 31 x 25 mm, found in an oviduct of a specimen collected on 8 October 1896 was described as being 'pure white sparingly marked all over with large round and oval bright brown and slaty-grey spots of various sizes, the majority forming an irregular ring at the larger end'.⁸ This range of dates suggests that the species may have a protracted breeding season. Its affinities to the Australian Cracticids suggest that it may build a cup-nest constructed of sticks and grass.

The distinctive calls of the Bristlehead are heard more frequently than the bird itself is seen. Feeding groups call to one another in a near continuous manner. It produces a variety of noises, the most frequently heard of which are a nasal, whining contact call and a constantly uttered *pit-pit-peeoo* interspersed with a corvid-like chatter. Calls are described as being nasal and highly distinctive. Other calls noted include a single loud whistle that each bird in the group utters in the space of 2–3 seconds.

Most of the diet appears to be taken by gleaning leaves, twigs and tree trunks. Birds will occasionally make short flights to pounce on settled insects and sally-gleaning has been noted on a number of occasions. Amongst recorded prey items, lepidopteran larvae, orthopterans, coleoptera (one stomach contained many brenthidae⁹), cockroaches, arachnids and other large insects seem to be the most frequently taken. Large insects are dismantled after being braced against a branch; the wings and legs of larger insects are discarded. Fruit seems to be taken

relatively infrequently but birds have been noted feeding on small olive to plum-sized fruit (IR).

Bristleheads are almost always encountered in mixed sex flocks of 6–10 individuals, although the occasional pair is not unknown. It is an active canopy species that occasionally descends to the sub-canopy, c. 40–60 m above the ground (MS). They possibly move in flocks, even when nesting. On occasions, birds have been noted feeding in canopy emergents.¹⁰ Members of the flock have been seen to spread across an area of up to 20 m radius (MS), although other observers have reported that individuals stay within close proximity of each other (JN). They have been noted feeding on large horizontal limbs, on which they move along in an ungainly manner with heavy sideways hops and bounds whilst calling loudly. Indeed, they have been described as moving in a woodpecker-like manner. They will ascend lianas by hopping upwards and turning 180 degrees with each hop, when they appear rather tit-like and they rarely stay long on any one branch (NA). Although infrequently recorded, they have been seen to cross open spaces, e.g. rivers (JN). Often the flock is accompanied by other large forest species, such as Black Magpie *Platysmurus leucopterus*, Malkohas, Babbler, Drongos, Trogons, Checker-throated Woodpecker *Picus mentalis*, Olive-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium raflesii*, and Hornbills. It is possible that at times Bristleheads may be flock leaders and Checker-throated Woodpeckers have been observed following Bristleheads.⁷

The Bornean Bristlehead is an enigmatic species favouring the forest canopy and for this reason it has proved very difficult to photograph. The two photographs reproduced here are thought to be the first known of the species. The photographer, Chris Artuso, was positioned on a ridge near the W10 mark on the famous Danum Valley grid system – one of the best places to see the species. The bird was part of a five-strong group moving through the canopy in the direction of the photographer. The ensuing commotion, combined with the birds' prominent red heads, made them surprisingly easy to pick up. They seemed to prefer prominent perches, where they would 'squat' for several minutes, making somewhat jerky head gestures as though trying to peer past obstacles to get a better look at the observer, before hopping off to look for another, similar perch. The individual in these photographs eventually approached to within very close range, perhaps lured by the foraging potential of the tall stump seen in the photo, and

did not seem at all wary of the presence of the photographer.

Acknowledgements

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Recently Published

Pearls to Painting – A Naturalist in Ceylon
The Memoirs of George Morrison Reid Henry.
Edited by Christine Johnson, with a foreword by Bruce Henry. St Ann's Books, Malvern, 2001. 140 pp; many illustrations and photos. £25. No ISBN.

G.M. Henry's *Guide to the Birds of Ceylon*, published in 1955, was, and is still, one of the most attractively illustrated and well written books on Asian birds to have appeared. Born in Ceylon in 1891, he lived and worked there mainly as an entomologist in the Colombo Museum, spending much time in the field, where, in addition to his insect research, he studied, collected, and drew birds continuously. Many present-day bird painters would be very envious of his opportunities. His memoirs were written towards the end of his long life – he died at the age of 92 – from the extremely detailed notebooks he kept throughout his life. The selection presented here ends with his retirement from the island in 1946, and is thus mainly of historical interest. The extracts are, as the Editor acknowledges, unedited, and make for somewhat heavy reading in places where the text, in what is quite a large format book (12 x 9 inches), is not broken up by any illustration. However, many delightful examples of his work are reproduced, ranging from sketches to post-mortem studies, finished illustration pages, and paintings of birds, insects and landscapes, with many in colour. These will be of interest to admirers of the art of the Reid Henry clan, amongst whom I have long been numbered, and more generally to all those interested in the rich birdlife and natural history of Sri Lanka.

Martin Woodcock

volume on the birds of Hong Kong is, therefore, an event of significance and importance.

The Avifauna of Hong Kong is unquestionably an impressive and scholarly work. It commences with chapters on the history of ornithology in Hong Kong, the physical characters of the region and its climate. There then follows a species list, summaries of both the breeding bird survey undertaken in the four years to 1996 and the winter waterbird counts, and chapters on bird ringing and the wild bird trade. The book ends with a gazetteer of place names and a bibliography of bird literature relating to Hong Kong. In between, is the main substance – the species accounts – and there is also a small section of colour photographs.

The breeding bird survey, carried out by just over 50 amateur birdwatchers, constituted the first organised attempt to gather comprehensive data on the breeding status and distribution of birds in Hong Kong. The results are depicted in clear and informative distribution maps. Curiously, however, and without explanation, maps for five species, Speckled Piculet, Bay Woodpecker, Blue-winged Minla, Vinous-throated Parrotbill and Eurasian Tree Sparrow are not included. The results not only provide a fascinating insight into Hong Kong's breeding species but, more importantly, constitute an index against which to gauge future changes; this will be an invaluable tool for conservation.

The analysis of winter waterbird counts is equally enlightening, even if the conclusions are salutary. The waterbird population in the Deep

The Avifauna of Hong Kong. By G.J.Carey, M.L.Chalmers, D.A.Diskin, P.R.Kennerley, P.J.Leader, M.R.Leven, R.W.Lewthwaite, D.S.Melville, M.Turnbull and L.Young. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, Hong Kong, 2001. 564 pp. 31pp colour photos. £34.50 (£26.50 to HKBWS members). ISBN 962-7508-02-0.

Hong Kong can boast an ornithological history that dates back close to 150 years and has been touched by such luminaries as Robert Swinhoe and J.D.D. La Touche. The publication of a major



Bay area showed annual, though variable, increases to a peak of around 70,000 in 1995–96. Thereafter, numbers have declined. Organic pollution, silt deposition arising from human interference with the flow of the Shenzhen River and hunting and human disturbance are all quoted as causes. Particularly frightening is the proposition that increasing organic pollution in the Deep Bay area has passed the point where it benefits the organisms on which waterbirds feed, and is now having a detrimental effect; the next stage could be a waterbird population crash. If this were not depressing enough, illegal hunting is seriously impacting on Deep Bay's waterbirds. An unsubstantiated estimate it may be, but 9,000 birds (mainly ducks and gulls) trapped in 2 km of nets each winter is too awful to contemplate.

The comprehensive review of records made in the course of the preparation of the book included a reassessment of the impact of Hong Kong's wild bird trade on the species list. The result has been the relegation of a number of species previously regarded as genuinely wild, particularly woodland specialists, to exotic status. Given the stated intention to err on the side of caution, it is not easy to understand how Orange-bellied Leafbird and White-bellied Yuhina escaped the weeding process, although it must be said that their acceptance as recent natural colonists is clearly cautioned by a reference to the possibility of their origins being escapes. I imagine the sole records of White-browed Crake and White-rumped Munia must have come within a whisker of being downgraded.

For the species accounts, taxonomy essentially follows Peters' *Check-list of Birds of the World*, English names follow Beaman (1994), ignoring the changes adopted in Beaman and Madge (1998), and for oriental species not covered by Beaman, Inskipp *et al.* (1996) is used. The order of species follows Howard and Moore (1991). Not more than a glance at this section, which as is to be expected constitutes the major part of the book, is required to appreciate the enormous effort that has gone into its preparation. All the records maintained by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society since its formation in 1957 have been examined, assessed and analysed, a procedure that has led to a review by the Records Committee of the HKBWS of a number of previously accepted records, especially some of the older ones. The accounts, which are liberally scattered with statistical charts, cover each species' world range, taxonomy, its status in Hong Kong and pattern of occurrence there, both historically and at the present time. The 'mechanics' of the charts are

explained in detail in an earlier chapter and this is essential reading if one is to avoid potential confusion. Many charts display more than one set of information, but in some the scale relates only to one of these datasets. Where this format has been adopted, it would have been better if it were clearly stated on the chart.

A juvenile Dark-sided Flycatcher is the subject of a delightfully designed cover and there are 31 further pleasant photographs of both habitats and birds. It is perhaps surprising that in a book devoted to the birds of Hong Kong there should be just one wader photograph. On the other hand, there cannot be many, if any, better photographs of Oriental Scops Owl, and what would one give to have taken the Dusky Thrush? Although doubtless an economic consideration, I would have much preferred it if the photographs had been spread throughout the book rather than placed in a block.

Inevitably, where so much detail has been brought together, there are errors but, so far as this reviewer could ascertain, they are commendably few and minor in nature. This is an outstanding work and a major contribution to the region's ornithological literature. Anyone with a real interest in the birds of Hong Kong cannot live without this book, for which the authors are to be hugely congratulated.

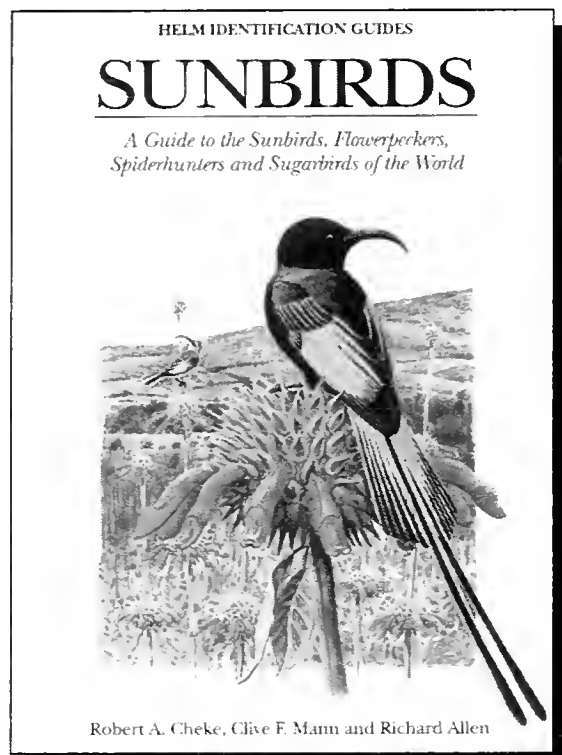
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Ray Tipper

Sunbirds: A Guide to the Sunbirds, Flowerpeckers, Spiderhunters and Sugarbirds of the World. By Robert A. Cheke and Clive F. Mann. Illustrated by Richard Allen. Christopher Helm, London, 2001. 384 pp. 48 colour plates; 176 maps. Hardback £37. ISBN 0-300-08940-6.

Sunbirds joins the rapidly expanding genre of family guides weighing down the bookshelves of the international ornithological community. The book follows a proven format – brief introduction, spectacular plates, detailed species accounts and maps, and comprehensive reference list. There is



no doubt that *Sunbirds* is an excellent piece of work; it compares extremely favourably to most of its peers in this genre. However, I would like to use 'Sunbirds' to face a hard question: where are family guides going?

The role of family guides in the literature is not a straightforward one. Traced back to the early days of *Seabirds*, *Shorebirds* and *Wildfowl* – groups holding species with potentially cosmopolitan distributions – the series focused on identification. A guide documenting Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* in equivalent detail to Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula* could be – for a lucky few! – of direct practical use. As the series has expanded, however, this logic has come apart. How often is one faced with identifying more than a handful of species of pitta, or woodpecker, or, indeed, sunbird? Of course, *Sunbirds* will be a useful tool in post-trip unravelling of complex field notes on a couple of intractable females. The 'similar species' sections of the species accounts succinctly and accurately fulfill this function, but will only ever be a minor portion of the book's appeal.

More important, I suggest, is the value of family guides as monographs. They present us with well-known samples of biodiversity, sliced taxonomically rather than the usual (field guide) approach of slicing geographically. To fill this role, I contend that family guides could usefully tackle several issues in rather more depth than has been reached to date, in particular taxonomic dynamism, distributional data, referencing of information, and synthesis within the global context. That family guides broach these issues is particularly pressing for them, in that *Handbook of the Birds of the World* is getting better with each volume – although the level of detail for each species is still generally less than most family

guides. Unless family guides can demonstrate their value as monographs, they will increasingly take a back seat to *HBW*.

In terms of taxonomy, it is important that family identification guides highlight outstanding problems rather than blandly following a single 'standard'. I'm not suggesting that such volumes should represent revisionary taxonomic studies in themselves, but they should reflect uncertainties and future directions. In fact, *Sunbirds* performs rather well in this aspect. The taxonomy of the sunbirds follows the most recent revisions by Irwin (1993: *Honeyguide* 39: 211–216; and 1999: *Honeyguide* 45: 45–58) who divided the sunbirds into 14 genera, instead of the five or so which most recent works cite. The authors of *Sunbirds* have added a further two genera to these. Interestingly, this bold new arrangement of the family was swiftly followed, with few exceptions, by the fifth edition of *Birds of the World: A Checklist* (2000) by Clements, who was given advance sight of the taxonomy to be followed by *Sunbirds*. This revision is also likely to be adopted by *Birds of Africa* and *HBW*.

What then is the way forward for taxonomic treatments within family identification guides? Maybe the section on geographic variation – which, in *Sunbirds*, documents subspecific plumage differentiation in detail – could be supplemented with one on taxonomic uncertainty. As a radical possibility, maybe family monographs could be testing grounds for application of the Phylogenetic Species Concept. As a final point here, it would be interesting to know where common names are coming from. *Sunbirds* introduces Black-belted Flowerpecker for *Dicaeum (australe) haematostictum* (p151), for instance, as well as innovations outside of the family such as Blue Fairy Flycatcher for *Elminia longicauda* (p208).

The presentation of distributional data is another arena in which family guides could move to the front of the field with relative ease. As is now standard, *Sunbirds* relies on "extent of occurrence" polygons shading each species' range. A few easy changes could greatly increase the utility of these maps: for example, labeling islands, mountains, countries and other features mentioned in the text. Similarly, judicious use of inset maps – as for Louisiade Flowerpecker *Dicaeum nitidum* (p164) – has great potential (although the grey lines on this map – presumably reefs – are baffling). Plus, of course, useful mapping relies on accuracy: *Sunbirds* generally excels, but errors have crept in, e.g., for Thick-billed Flowerpecker *D. agile*, correctly described

as “moderately common on Sumbawa” and “common in parts of southern Laos” but with a map specifically excluding both (p141); for Red-striped Flowerpecker *D. australe*, incorrectly mapped for Mindoro where it is in fact replaced by an allospecies (p151); and for Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *D. ignipectum*, for which the entire Philippine distribution appears to have slipped off the map (p168). Accuracy in description is essential, too: there are two (not three) Philippine endemic *Prionochilus*, and three (not two) species widespread across Sundaland (p134).

More radically, though, advances in GIS now mean that elevational data can be overlaid onto distribution data to give range maps that reflect areas of occupancy much more accurately. Thus, for example, it is not enormously helpful to map montane species like Olive-capped Flowerpecker *D. nigrilore* (p148), Crimson-crowned Flowerpecker *D. nehrkorni* (p160) and Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *D. ignipectum* (p168) in the lowlands. Why not restrict their ranges altitudinally, as appears to have been done for Flame-crowned Flowerpecker *D. erythrothorax* (p148)? In a similar vein, given that the Cebu Biodiversity Foundation have now rediscovered Cebu Flowerpecker *D. quadricolor* at Nug-as in southern Cebu (see <http://www.cbcbf.cjb.net>), why not map this? Potentially the most significant advance, though, would be to move from range maps to point localities, with a museum specimen, reference, or sight record, plus a date, underlying each point. BirdLife International’s *Threatened Birds of Asia* (see <http://www.rdb.or.id>) recently demonstrated that such an approach is possible. Given the huge work invested in museum visits and literature review in preparing family guides, it shouldn’t be impossible to compile these kinds of high resolution maps.

A third field in which family guides currently but unnecessarily underperform is in referencing. As with mapping, part of this is simple typographic error, e.g., “Tree (1990)” (p30) instead of “Tree (1991)” (p374); “Allen (2001)” (p159), not appearing in the references because this is in fact “Allen (pers. comm. 2001)” (p160); and the bizarre “in pressw” (p170). More annoying is the use of “in prep.” documents – shaky ground, given that these have the habit of never actually appearing – and of preliminary reports such as “Butchart *et al.* (1993)” (p362) which have subsequently been published (in this case, in *Bird Conservation International* 6: 335–370, 1996). Depth of literature review is of course essential, and I have no complaints with *Sunbirds* for which ~1,000 citations were painstakingly retrieved, but there

will always be the occasional omission or two (e.g., the useful Turner *et al.* *Kenya Birds* 3: 35–37, 1994).

The fundamental issue with referencing, however, is the importance of citing specific pieces of information rather than providing batches of references at the end of species accounts. While this would admittedly add to text length (minimally, if footnotes were utilised), it would allow any information to be traced directly back to source, both providing scientific rigour and giving due credit to the data provider. In the case of *Sunbirds*, it is particularly frustrating that the lengthy sections on food plants and parasites are not referenced. These data will only be interesting to a few specialists, to whom their utility without references is minimal. Finally, referencing is essential to enable readers to determine whether questionable sources have been dismissed or whether they have simply been overlooked. For instance, *Sunbirds* appears to reject the claims of Curio *et al.* to have found Scarlet-collared Flowerpecker *D. retrocinctum* on Negros and Panay, but without explicit citation there is no way that a reader can be sure of this.

Finally, given the wealth of data compiled within the family guides, there is a golden opportunity for synthesis. The introductory sections would be the best place for such material, but in *Sunbirds*, as in most other family guides, these are interesting but scanty. Thus, for example, I can find nowhere in *Sunbirds* that even gives the number of species covered in the book! (It is 176: 2 sugarbirds, 44 flowerpeckers, and 130 sunbirds and spiderhunters.) More generally, what are the emerging conservation and research priorities? What are the distribution patterns for the family as a whole? How many are listed in *Threatened Birds of the World* as globally threatened or near-threatened? (Happily, only nine and 13, respectively.) What proportion have restricted-ranges (<50,000 sq. km) following *Endemic Bird Areas of the World*? (30%.) What proportion are endemic to the biodiversity *Hotspots*? (49%.) How many species are missing data for voice (seven), movements (75), known food plants (39), nest (40), eggs (43), or laying months (12)? Presentation of these kinds of summary data would be straightforward, and enormously valuable in placing the group in its global context.

To conclude, I should stress that none of this should be taken as criticism of *Sunbirds* in itself – it is a fantastic book! – and both the text and the artwork do full justice to the brilliance of the birds in question. Who could resist the finch-sized São Tomé Sunbird *Dreptes thomensis*? There are

intriguing enigmas, including strangely aberrant and scarcely known species like Mottled Flowerpecker *D. tristrami* and Whitehead's Spiderhunter *Arachnothera juliae*. There are evidently new species awaiting, as evidenced by the discovery of two sunbirds (Rufous-winged *Cinnyris rufipennis* and Lina's *Aethopyga linaraborae*) in the last two decades. And, quite simply, there are stunners – look at the Fire-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga ignicauda* and imagine seeing

them (as Jesper Hornskov has reported on Oriental Birding) in groups of over 100, migrating along mountain ridges in Yunnan. Buy this book (especially because HBW will not reach sunbirds for several years), but hope that family guides spread their wings rather further as they continue to appear.

Tom Brooks

SHORT REVIEWS

Autumn Bird Migration at Beidaihe, China, 1986-1990 (incorporating the report on China Cranewatch 1986). Edited by Martin D. Williams. Beidaihe International Birdwatching Society, 2000 (c/o Martin Williams, 1/F 15 Sin Kwai Wan, Cheung Chau, Hong Kong). 144 pp, numerous figures and line drawings. £6.50 + p&p. No ISBN.

A valuable report on the pioneering autumn studies at Beidaihe in the late 1980s. Although the observations are more than a decade old, the records presented here are well worth documenting, and will be of interest to many, especially now that Beidaihe is recognised as one of the world's great migration watchpoints.

Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe. By George B. Schaller. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1998. 374 pp, numerous figures and black-and-white photos. £xxx. ISBN 0-226-73652-0.

This is the first detailed study of the natural history of one of the world's least known ecosystems, and the project led by the author and his team of co-workers led to the creation of the huge Chang Tang Reserve in 1993. The book focuses on the plains ungulates, many of which are threatened due to illegal hunting and a recent increase in the human population.

Ornithology of Sabah: History, Gazetteer, Annotated Checklist, and Bibliography. By Frederick H. Sheldon, Robert G. Moyle and Jody Kennard. Ornithological Monographs No. 52. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C., 2001. vi + 285 pp. \$25 + p&p. ISBN 1-891276-24-7.

The bulk of this book comprises an annotated checklist of the birds of Sabah, and inevitably the detailed distributional information is far more complete than even the latest edition of *Birds of Borneo* (Smythies 1999). There is also much other information, on such topics as habitats, breeding and voice. This is an important addition to the literature on the avifauna of Borneo.

Kinabalu: Summit of Borneo (Revised and expanded edition). Edited by K.M. Wong and A. Phillipps. The Sabah Society and Sabah Parks, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 1996. xx + 544 pp. Many colour photos. No price. ISBN 967-99947-4-0.

This very welcome new edition of a fascinating book is a celebration of the wonderful wildlife and natural history of Borneo's highest mountain. Introductory chapters deal with the mountain's geology, exploration and folklore, while the bulk of the book is devoted to accounts of the exotic flora and fauna. Each chapter is written by specialists in their field and lavishly illustrated with sumptuous colour photographs. The production is superb, and the book is far superior to the original 1978 edition.



From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from January 2001–March 2002. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

CAMBODIA

Four more new species have been added to the national list this year, the most significant being **Orange-necked Partridge** *Arborophila davidi*, which was photo-trapped on a bamboo-dominated slope along the Pam River (c.150 m elevation), southern Keo Siema District, southern Mondulhiri Province (c.5 km from the Vietnamese border) on 18th February (per PD). The other three were 3–4 **Pale-headed Woodpeckers** *Gecinulus grantia*, in the same general area as the partridge, on 23rd and 25th January (JND), **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*, with a single along the main street (which is a waterway) in the floating village of Chong Kneas, NW end of Tonle Sap on 10th March (PH, DWi), and two more on Kratie Lake on 21st March (DF), and a **Golden-bellied Gerygone** *Gerygone sulphurea* singing in degraded mangroves 10–15 km SE of Kampot on 24th March (DF). At least 5–7 **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* wintered in the Kruos Kraom area, Kompong Thom Province (PD, HC *et al.*), and singles were seen at three other localities within the Tonle Sap inundation zone, Kompong Thom, and there were several records of **Imperial Eagle** *A. heliaca*, with a juvenile over Kruos Kraom on 19th January 2002 (PD, HC, JND, UT), a second calendar year bird there on 14th February (PD), and an adult found exhausted (later caught by local villagers) at Phum Kruul, Baray District, in late December (per PD). Noteworthy records of large waterbirds included: at least two **White-winged Ducks** *Cairina scutulata* at a roost site in the Chenda logging concession, Choam Ksan District, Preah Vihear Province in late January 2002 (TS), six **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* over the Sre Ambel River, c.7 km south-west of Sre Ambel town, SW Cambodia on 15th December (SK, TS, PBU), and presumably the same birds seen again, flying south-east over the same river 2 km closer to the town on 26th January (PD, CP), at least nine **Sarus Cranes** in grasslands between Route 6a and the Stoeng Stung River, Stung District, western Kompong Thom (near the Siem Reap border) on 30th January 2002, with 8 still

there on 2nd–3rd March (SS), a single **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata* at Prek Toal (Tonle Sap) in late January 2002 (FG), perhaps the first field record from Cambodia since 1998, two **Milky Storks** *Mycteria cinerea* over the Sre Ambel River c.7 km south-west of Sre Ambel town on 15th December (SK, TS, PBU), and singles of this species with groups of up to 150 **Painted Storks** *M. leucocephala* in the Kruos Kraom area on 17th and 19th February (PD), the latter presumably wanderer(s) from Prek Toal. Also of interest were a single **Indochinese Green Magpie** *Cissa hypoleuca* and **Ochraceous Bulbuls** *Alophoixus ochraceus* in the Pam River catchment, Samling logging concession, southern Keo Siema District, southern Mondulhiri Province during 23rd–25th January 2002 (JND), both new for the NE, and some good records of **Manchurian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus tangorum*, with 30+ in the Kruos Kraom area this winter, and hundreds thought to be present+ (PD), a single bird at Boeng Toul



White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* by Jan Wilczur

Krous, near the Stoeng Stung River, Stung District (c.60 km north-west of Kompong Thom town) on 30th January 2002 (PD), and two in Chhep District, Preah Vihear Province in late February 2002 (PH,DWi). At least ten **Mekong Wagtails** *Motacilla sinuata* were being seen regularly during the winter at Kratie, the most accessible site for this newly described species from Phnom Penh. Good recent high counts at Ang Tropeang Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve, Banteay Meanchey Province, have included: 15,000+ **Lesser Whistling-ducks** *Dendrocygna javanica*, 290 **Comb Ducks** *Sarkidiornis melanotis*, and 2,600 **Garganey** *Anas querquedula*, all during the Asian Waterfowl Census on 20th January 2002 (CPr,CP,PBa,FG *et al.*), and 140+ **Spotted Redshanks** *Tringa erythropus* on 11th March 2002 (PH,DWi), the highest single count in the country to date. Other good counts during the period under review included c.220 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* in one flock, south-west of Kruos Kraom (towards the Kompong Thom/Kompong Chhnang Provincial border) on 26th–27th March 2002 (JE,SK,KL), possibly the highest number recorded in a single flock anywhere in the country in recent decades at least, 4,000+ **Sand Martins** *Riparia riparia* in the Kruos Kraom area during 18th–21st January 2002, with 2000+ on 15th February (PD), and 1,200+ **Red-rumped Swallows** *Hirundo daurica* roosting in grassland and scrub at Kruos Kraom on 14th February (PD).

CHINA

Hong Kong

Potential additions to the Hong Kong list between March 2001 and February 2002 were: a **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* at Mai Po on 13th March, a third-year **Vega Gull** *Larus vegae* in front of the Mai Po boardwalk on 20th February (all previously published records are now thought to refer to **Heuglin's** *L. h. taimyrensis* × **Vega** hybrids), two **Red-necked Grebes** *Podiceps grisegena* at Yan Chau Tong on 16th November, a **Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* at Starling Inlet on 18th February, a petrel *Pterodroma* sp. (photographed but as yet unidentified) from the Mai Po boardwalk on 17th March, a **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus* at Cape d'Aguilar during a typhoon on 6th July, a **Brown-breasted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa muttui* at Tai Po Kau during November–January, and up to six **Mountain Bulbuls** *Hypsipetes mccllellandii* at Tai Po Kau throughout January. Other interesting recent reports have included one or two **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis* in October or November 2001 (first

recorded in autumn 1999), a single **Lesser Shortwing** *Brachypteryx leucophris* at Shek Kong on 9th December (following the first records at Tai Mo Shan in July and August), and occasional reports of up to two **Mountain Tailorbirds** *Orthotomus cuculatus* at five sites (including Tai Po Kau and Mai Po) and up to two **Pygmy Wren Babblers** *Pnoepyga pusilla* at Tai Po Kau, during November–February (first reported from Hong Kong in 1999 and 2000 respectively). A single **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* near Mai Po on 19th January was the third record, single Black Bazas *Aviceda leuphotes* in the northern and eastern New Territories in January and February were the first ever in winter, and a first winter **Daurian Jackdaw** *Corvus dauuricus* in the Tsim Bei Tsui area on two dates in February was only the fourth record. Two **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes** *Monticola rufiventris* at Kadoorie FBG in February were possibly the same birds returning for the third consecutive winter. (All records from RL/Hong Kong Bird Watching Society.)

Mainland China

The most noteworthy recent records received were of an adult **Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* and a first winter **Pallas's Gull** *L. ichthyaetus* at Yancheng, Jiangsu on 1st December (JH), a single **Oriental Stork** *Ciconia boyciana* along the Pudong coast, south of Shanghai on 10th February 2002 (JH,GC), and two **Japanese Thrushes** *Turdus cardis* at the French Concession, Shanghai, during 28th–30th October (JH).

INDIA

The most unusual recent sighting was of a single **Stock Pigeon** *Columba oenas* reported from Nameri, Assam, in December (EV), a potential first for the subcontinent. The bulk of interesting sightings however, came from the west, north-west and north. In the Goa area, there was **Grey-tailed Tattler** *Heteroscelus brevipes* on saltpans near Fort Aguada on 28th February 2002 and **Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus* on flooded fields at Baga on 9th March 2002 (PaH,PeH). In Gujarat, a female and a first-winter male **Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana* were seen at Velavadar National Park on 18th January 2001 (WSu). Also in Gujarat were 12–14 **Crested Treeswifts** *Hemiproctes coronata* at two sites in Gir Forest National Park on 16th January 2001 (WSu), and a total of >100 **Sykes's Larks** *Galerida deva* in several small flocks at Velavadar NP on 18th January 2001 (WSu). From 3rd January 2001 there were numerous sightings of **Sind Sparrow** *Passer*



Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra* by Dan Cole

pyrrhonotus from 14 sites in eastern Haryana south to Bhindawas, and a single bird in north New Delhi throughout 2001 (SSh *et al.*). Breeding was proved at several sites during the monsoon. These are the first records of this recent colonist from Haryana. Other reported firsts for Haryana during the period under review included **Greater Flameback** *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* (very common) and several **Slaty-headed Parakeets** *Psittacula himalayana* at Kalesar on 19th–21st October (BH,SSh), at least two **Collared Owlets** *Glaucidium brodiei* at Kalesar on 18th October (BH,SSh), a pair of **Jungle Owlets** *Glaucidium radiatum* at Kalesar on 19th October (BH,SSh), an adult male **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Basai on 4th July (BH), several **Golden-fronted Leafbirds** *Chloropsis aurifrons* and **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike** *Hemipus picatus* (common) at Kalesar on 19th–21st October (BH,SSh), a pair of **Snowy-browed Flycatchers** *Ficedula hyperythra* at Kalesar on 20th October (BH,SSh), **Slaty-blue Flycatcher** *Ficedula tricolor* (common), several **Tickell's Blue**

Flycatchers *Cyornis tickelliae*, several **Velvet-fronted Nuthatches** *Sitta frontalis*, several **Grey-hooded Warblers** *Seicercus xanthoschistos*, and **Puff-throated Babbler** *Pellornium ruficeps* (common) all at Kalesar on 19th–21st October (BH,SSh). Also of interest in this general region were: a female **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* on the Yamuna River, New Delhi on 18th November (many observers), the first in Delhi for many years, an immature **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* at Sultanpur on 5th–6th October (BH,MK,GW,LC), a female **Indian Cuckoo** *Cuculus micropterus* at Sonapat, Haryana on 21st April (several observers), a single **Upland Buzzard** *Buteo hemilasius* at the Yamuna River, New Delhi on 2nd December (many observers), the first from Delhi, several **Lesser Kestrels** *Falco naumanni*, with an adult male at Bhindawas, Haryana on 1st February 2001 (BH,SSh), an adult male at Basai, Haryana on 25th October–1st November (BH), and a pair at Bhindawas on 14th November (BH), a single **Black-headed Cuckooshrike** *Coracina melanoptera* at Sultanpur on 25th February 2001 (BH,ND), several **Common Ioras** *Aegithina tiphia* at Kalesar on 19th–21st October (BH,SSh), several **White-capped Water Redstarts** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* near Kalesar on 20th October (BH,SSh) and a single near Sonapat on 13th–31st December (SSh), several **Plumbeous Water Redstarts** *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* near Kalesar and Yamunanagar, Haryana on 20th–21st October (BH,SSh) and a single near Sonapat on 13th–31st December (SSh), and a male **Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* at Khader, New Delhi on 30th September (MK *et al.*), a new record for Delhi. A first winter **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur) on 22nd January 2001 (WSu) had already been seen over a prolonged period by other observers. Good birds at this site during winter 2001/2002 included a single **Brown Hawk Owl** *Ninox scutulata* on 30th November (also present before and after this date), found by local guides (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), and a single **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* on 3rd December (CR *et al.*/Birdquest). Further west, two Himalayan species were found well to the south of their normal ranges: a male **Mrs Gould's Sunbird** *Aethopyga gouldiae* and a male **Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis*, both seen on several occasions and filmed, at Tiger Moon resort, near Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, during 22nd–26th January 2002 (SM,CC,SC,SuC,TC). The sunbird had been found earlier in January (DF/Birdquest). Nearby Suriwal Lake held a single **White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* and small numbers of

Water Pipits *Anthus spinoletta contellii* on 6th December (CR *et al.*/Birdquest); the latter has occurred regularly at this site in recent years. A male **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* between Sam and Sudaseri, Desert National Park on 28th January 2001 (WSu) was highly unusual, as were up to five **Horned Grebes** *Podiceps auritus* at Harike Barrage, Punjab during 1st–3rd February 2001 (SRup,WSu,GH,W-RI,WM,HR,CG *et al.*). In Corbett National Park, a juvenile **Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos* was seen well at Dhikala on 23rd–24th November 2001 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), and a small patch of elephant grass near Kinanauli held singles of **Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler** *Cettia major* and **Nepal Wren Babbler** *Pnoepyga immaculata*, both singing, on 24th November 2001 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest). There were two other new site records for **Nepal Wren Babbler**, with single singing birds near the forktail stream bridge at Quality Inn on 22nd November 2001 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), and in a ravine close to the Eureka Factory, near Sat Tal, on 26th November 2001 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest). All three records of this latter species were in rather atypical habitat (i.e. distant from flowing streams or rivers). Other highlights in the Naini Tal area included a single **Thick-billed Warbler** *Acrocephalus aedon* near Eureka Factory, and a male **Vinaceous Rosefinch** *Carpodacus vinaceus* along the temple trail, both near Sat Tal, on 26th November 2001 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest). A single **Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* at Bandhavgarh on 5th January 2002 (CBr) was unusual, as was an **Eye-browed Thrush** *T. obscurus* seen at Mount Harriet, South Andaman on 28th January 2002 (CBr). Continued observations in Malda District, West Bengal (AS) turned up two **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* at Farakka Barrage on 25th June, and a single **Scarlet Minivet** *Pericrocotus flammeus* at Adina Reserve Forest on 24th August. During a visit to Sagan Island, Sunderbans Delta, West Bengal on 22nd–23rd November (AS), two **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** *Calidris pygmaeus* and 12 **Common Starlings** *Sturnus vulgaris* were seen, while interesting ornithological observations during a Tiger census at Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, West Bengal during 7th–14th December, included **Brown-winged Kingfisher** *Halcyon amauroptera* (commonly sighted), **Ruddy Kingfisher** *Halcyon coromanda*, **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** (commonly seen), **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus* (commonly seen), and a dead **Lesser Yellow-nape** *Picus chlorolophus* at Ponchomuichani block 2 on 11th December, the first from the Sunderbans region.

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

A single **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* at Paya Beach, Pulau Tioman on 8th July (SR) was the first from this island. A breeding colony of **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta garzetta* discovered in Malim Nawar, Perak Cheang on 4th November (KS,WSK) constitutes the first breeding record for Peninsular Malaysia. About 50 nests (some with chicks) were counted in a fig tree in the middle of a fish-farm pond. A four hour count of **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes* migrating southwards over Taiping, Perak on 12th November 2001 (LKC,LSY) yielded an impressive 2,322 birds, by far the highest number in one day at this raptor migration observation site to date.

MYANMAR

A visit during 24th November and 6th December (CI,TI,DB) turned up some interesting species. There were five new records for S Myanmar: eight **Eastern Marsh Harriers** *Circus spilonotus* at Yelegale, west of Ma-u-bin, Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) Delta, Ayeyarwady State during 25th–26th and another between Yelegale and Yangon on 26th, a single sub-adult **Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* over the Ayeyarwady River on 26th, 10 **Dusky Crag Martins** *Hirundo concolor* on 29th, and up to six **Limestone Wren Babblers** *Napothera crispifrons* on 28th at Weibyan, near Bawthabyu, east of Kyaikto, Kayin State, and single **Brown-throated Sunbirds** *Anthreptes malacensis* at Yelegale and Ma-u-bin on 25th and 26th respectively. Nine new species were recorded from Tenasserim: a single **Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* at Hpa-an on 29th, two **Black-headed Gulls** *Larus ridibundus* and three **Short-toed Snake Eagles** *Circaetus gallicus* c.15 km north of Mawlmeyne, Kayin State on 4th, two **Common Buzzards** *Buteo buteo* at Kayon during 2nd–4th, and another single c.15 km north of Mawlmeyne on 4th, a single sub-adult **Imperial Eagle** at Kayon during 2nd–4th, at least 20 **Intermediate Egrets** *Mesophoyx intermedia* and a single **Grey-backed Shrike** *Lanius tephronotus* at Kyaut-ka-lut, south-east of Hpa-an, Kayin State on 30th, a single **Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope* at Zwe-gabin peak, south-east of Hpa-an on 30th, and a single **Rosy Pipit** *Anthus roseatus* at Kyaut-ka-lut on 30th. Two **Peregrine Falcons** *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* at Kayon during 2nd–4th extended the range of this resident race in Myanmar to north Tenasserim. Also of interest were two pairs and a single **Sarus Crane** *Grus antigone* near

Yelegale on 25th, welcome recent confirmation of its continued occurrence in the region, two **Steppe Eagles** *A. nipalensis* over Zwe-ga-bin peak on 30th, several records of **Greater Spotted Eagle** *A. clanga*, with four at Yelegale on 25th, an immature c.15 km north of Mawlmyine on 4th, and three near Kayon on 5th, an immature dark morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* c.15 km north of Mawlmyine on 4th, 200 **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* and 40 **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* at Yelegale on 25th, eight **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* flying east over Mawlmyine with eight **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* on 1st, at least 22 **Painted Storks** at Yelegale during 24th–25th, another 24 flying north-east over Mawlmyine on 1st, and four at Moyingyi Wetland Bird Sanctuary, north-west of Waw, Bago (Pegu) State on 6th, and ten Greater **Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* near Yelegale on 24th. 30 **Asian Golden Weavers** *Ploceus hypoxanthus* attending nests and feeding young at Yelegale on 25th provided a new late breeding date for the region. A slightly later visit to the Ayeyarwady Delta and other parts of S Myanmar in mid December (DB), was also very fruitful. Two **Bar-tailed Godwits** *Limosa lapponica* during a boat trip from Yangon to Let Chot Konee, close to the coast south of Yangon on 16th were a long overdue addition to the Myanmar list. New records for S Myanmar came in the form of **Black-headed Gull**, with two during the boat trip from Yangon to Let Chot Konee and five from the Hteedan Ferry, Yangon on 17th, no fewer than 60 **Lesser Crested Terns** *Sterna bengalensis* at Chaung Tha Beach, north-west of Patheingyi (Bassein) on 7th or 8th, and **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis tickelliae*, with three at Chaung Tha Beach on 7th or 8th and a single in Hlawga Park, near Yangon on 18th or 20th. Other highlights included an impressive 521 **Pallas's Gulls** *Larus ichthyæetus*, 67 **White-winged Terns** *Chlidonias leucopterus* (the first winter records from the region), and three **Painted Storks**, all during the same boat trip from Yangon to Let Chot Konee, 1,050 **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* at Moyingyi WBS on 13th, more **Eastern Marsh Harriers**, with eight at Moyingyi WBS on 13th and three at Orchard Farm, Ma-u-bin on 15th, single **Greater Spotted Eagles** at Moyingyi WBS on 13th and near Daida Naw, between Yangon and Let Chot Konee (by road) on 17th, two **Steppe Eagles** at Moyingyi WBS on 13th, 166 **Glossy Ibises** at Orchard Farm on 15th, 80 **Black-headed Ibises** at a high-tide roost at Let Chot Konee, and the *lencogenis* race of **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, with two at Chaung Tha Beach on 7th or 8th and another in

Hlawga Park, near Yangon on 18th or 20th. On Mount Victoria, during January or February 2002 (JE), three new species for W Myanmar were recorded: **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*, a single **Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*, and most amazingly, at least two (number not specified) female or juvenile **Crimson-browed Finches** *Propyrrhula snblhimachala* watched at length with **Common Rosefinches** *Carpodacus erythrinnus*, just below the summit; the first record south of the Himalayas? Also of interest was **Brown Hornbill** *Anorrhinus tickelli* half way up the mountain.

NEPAL

Several flocks of **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis*, totalling an estimated 500+ birds, were seen near Tarhara, somewhere between Koshi Barrage and Dharan forest, on 4th November (DG).

PHILIPPINES

Two interesting records were received from a trip made during December 2001–January 2002 (AJ,RA,TH,SA,LP,JS). A female and an immature **Great Frigatebird** *Fregata minor* at St. Paul National Park, Palawan on 17th December were apparently new for the island, and an amazing count of 940 **Philippine Ducks** *Anas luzonica*, made at Subic Bay, Luzon, was the second or third biggest ever.

RUSSIA

Siberia

A trip to Buryatia, Siberia in June–July (JM,PSt) turned up a few interesting records. Highlights at Civyrrkujskij Bay, Zabajkal'skij National Park, north-east Lake Baikal during 14th–16th June included singing males of both **Orange-flanked Bush Robin** *Tarsiger cyamurus* and **Yellow-browed Bunting** *Emberiza chrysophrys*. A male **Jack Snipe** *Limnocyttus minimus* was heard at Barmasovye Lakes, Zabajkal'skij NP on 12th June, a single **Swan Goose** *Anser cygnoides* was found in a flock of **Whooper Swans** *Cygnus cygnus* near the southern end of Civyrrkujskij Bay on 21st June (probably the first observation at Lake Baikal since 1975), and another **Jack Snipe** was heard at Svjatoj Nos wetlands, Zabajkal'skij NP on 24th and 26th June.

SINGAPORE

There was no news of any new records, but the following observations were noteworthy: a single **White-bellied Woodpecker** *Dryocopus javensis* at Pulau Tekong Besar on 18th January 2002 (RKO,SR,RT,YSH) and a **Blue-eared Kingfisher** *Alcedo meninting* there on 17th January, 2002 (SR), both firsts for the island, a female **Whiskered Treeswift** *Hemiprocne comata* at the BKE pipeline, Bukit Timah NR on 4th August (CSC,EL,RO,SR), only the 4th recent record, two **Green Imperial Pigeons** *Ducula aenea* at Pulau Tekong Besar on 18th January (RKO,SR,RT,YSH), the first from the island and the first Singapore record in a few years, two **Red-wattled Lapwings** *Vanellus indicus* at Kranji Marsh on 15th August (LTM,SR), a single **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* seen at Che Jawa, Pulau Ubin on 21st August & again on 22nd August over the adjacent islet of Pulau Sekudu (SR), the first confirmed Singapore record since 1950, a sub-adult **Crested Serpent Eagle** *Spilornis cheela* over MacRitchie north-west on 23rd November (JB,HB,RO,SR), a female **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* over St. Johns Island on 23rd September (RO,SR), a single **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Serangoon on 24th (JG,JuG,TG,RO,SR) and 30th (SR,MS,JW) December, a female **Blue-throated Flycatcher** *Cyornis rubeculoides* at Pulau Hantu Besar on 23rd September (RO,SR), the first from Singapore's southern islands, a **Vinous-breasted Starling** *Sturnus burmannicus* with **Javan Mynas** *Acridotheres javanicus* at the junction of Tampines Expressway and Central Expressway on 22nd October (SR), and a single **Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* at Pulau Tekong Besar on 8th October (SR).

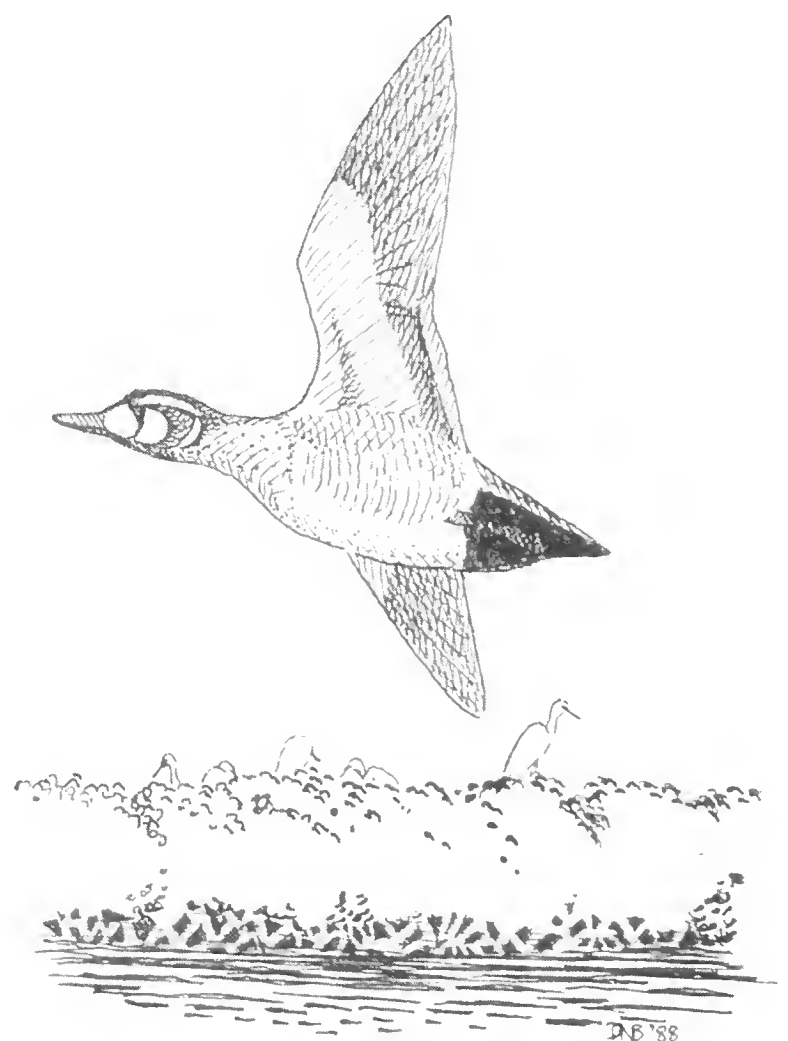
SRI LANKA

Two **Common Rosefinches** *Carpodacus erythrinus*, a new species for the country, were reported from the Arrenga Pool area, Horton Plains, with a male on 6th February 2002 (PR,BHo *et al.*), and a female or first winter bird the following day (OM,DW,PHu). There has been another **Bay-backed Shrike** *Lanius vittatus*, this time at Yala National Park, where it was reported on 31st December 2001 (BS,MS), 4th February 2002 (PHu,DW *et al.*), and 24th–25th March (AI). It seems that it had also been seen earlier by many observers. A calling male **Rain Quail** *Coturnix coromandelica* was taped-out and seen in flight, and another four heard calling at Uda Walawe National Park on 29th December 2001 (CR *et al.* / Birdquest), suggesting that the species breeds

commonly in the very extensive suitable habitat at this site. The only other interesting news received, was of a juvenile **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis* soaring above the mountains a few kilometres west of Kotmale, on 1st January 2002 (PL,WP,AO).

TAIWAN

Vagrants recorded during July–December were: two **Tundra Swans** *Cygnus columbianus* at Fu-Li, Hwalien on 12th November (T-YL), a single **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* at Kao-Mei, Taichung on 26th November (S-SC), two **Red-breasted Mergansers** *Mergus serrator* at Auku, Chiayi on 30th November–17th December (K-AL), a single **Scaly-sided Merganser** *Mergus squamatus* at Lung-Luan-Tan, Pingtung from 28th October–13th November (KC), single **Baikal Teals** *Anas formosa* at Li-Tse, Ilan on 17th November (C-YH) and Kuan-Tu, Taipei on 20th–29th December (R-YKu,P-JC), a single **Baer's Pochard** *Aythya baeri* at She-Tzu, Taipei on 10th November (K-HC), a single **Black-chinned Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus leclancheri* at Hen-Shan, Ilan on 30th September (C-FF), a **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* at Chi-Pei, Penghu Archipelago during 31st October–7th November (C-YP), two **Asian Dowitchers** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Li-Tse on 11th November (C-YH), two **Long-billed Dowitchers** *L. scolopaceus* at Wen-Ti, Ilan on 17th November



Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* by Craig Robson

(C-AL), a single **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* at Tseng-Wen Estuary, Tainan on 17th September (Y-TF), a **Western Sandpiper** *C. mauri* at Han-Pao, Changhwa on 30th September (M-CT), a single **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* at Pei-Kang Estuary, Yunlin on 30th November (K-AL)–29th December (KC), two **Oriental Plovers** *Charadrius veredus* at Hua-Chiang-Chiao, Taipei on 22nd September (K-TH), a **Long-billed Plover** *C. placidus* at Tien-Liao-Yang, Taipei on 25th December (P-JC), two **Grey-headed Lapwings** *Vanellus cinereus* at Tung-Kang, Pingtung on 14th October (P-HH), a **Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos* at Taipei domestic airport on 4th September (C-HW), a single **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* at Chung-Liao-Shan, Kaohsiung from 9th September–6th November (F-KH), a **Horned Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* at Kao-Mei on 26th November (S-SC), a **Black-necked Grebe** *P. nigricollis* at Wen-Ti on 23rd (C-FF)–31st December (K-AL), a single **Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis* at Kuan-To, Taipei on 18th November (C-Y,LU), two **Von Schrenck's Bitterns** *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* at Wen-Ti on 30th December (TKBC), a **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* at Auku on 3rd November (M-CT,L-LW)–29th December (KC), a single **Oriental Stork** *C. boyciana* at Yuan-Chung Kang, Kaohsiung from 25th November–27th December (T-YL), a single **Bull-headed Shrike** *Lanius bucephalus* at Wu-His, Changhwa on 22nd September–3rd November (R-CH), a **Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* at Cape Fu-Kuey, Taipei on 3rd November (R-YKu), two **Black-winged Cuckooshrikes** *Coracina melaschistos* at Yin-Ta Farm, Pingtung on 1st October (P-HH)–11th November (C-KH), two **Ashy Drongos** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* at Yeh-liu, Taipei on 23rd September (T-MY), 30 **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* at Pei-Kuan, Ilan on 7th October (M-HT), a single **White-throated Rock Thrush** *Monticola gularis* at Yeh-liu on 10th October (S-CC), the second record from Taiwan, a **Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera sibirica* at Yeh-liu on 9th November (Y-WH), six **Japanese Thrushes** *Turdus cardis* at Yeh-liu on 11th November (S-CC), two **Grey-backed Thrushes** *T. hortulorum* at Yeh-liu on 16th November (T-YL), a single **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia* at the Botanic Garden, Taipei on 6th–11th October (K-AL,R-YKu), two **Verditer Flycatchers** *Eumyias thalassina* at Fu-Yuan, Hwalien on 15th December (L-YL), the fifth Taiwan record, two **Blue-and-white Flycatchers** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* at Yeh-liu on 13th October (R-YKu), three **Japanese Robins** *Erithacus akahige* at Yeh-liu on 11th November (M-HT,S-CC), a single female **Ryukyu**

Robin *E. komadori* at Yeh-liu on 13th October (W-TC,S-CC,R-YKu), the second from Taiwan, two **Rufous-tailed Robins** *Luscinia sibilans* at Yeh-liu on 13th October (S-CC), a single **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* at Yeh-liu on 10th–13th October (S-CC), a **Purple-backed Starling** *Sturnus sturninus* at Chang-Liang, Hwalien on 15th September (S-YH), a **Chinese Penduline Tit** *Remiz consobrinus* at Chin-Shan, Taipei on 9th November (TKBC), a **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus tenellipes* at Yeh-liu on 23rd–30th September (S-CC), a single **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* at Hsin-Jen, Penghu Archipelago on 6th October (C-HC), a **Japanese Hawfinch** *Eophona personata* at Chin-Shan on 18th November (M-CH) and two more at Wu-Lin Farm, Taichung on 25th November (J-HW), a single **Meadow Bunting** *Emberiza cioides* at Chi-Pei on 30th October (C-YP), the second from the island, a **Yellow-browed Bunting** *E. chrysophrys* at Yeh-liu on 6th–12th November (C-JK,Y-YC), a **Rustic Bunting** *E. rustica* at Chin-Shan on 30th December (M-CH), and two **Tristram's Buntings** *E. tristrami* at Taipei on 7th November (P-JC). 71 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* at Kao-Mei on 26th November (S-SC) was a high count of this globally threatened species.

THAILAND

There have been three recent additions to the Thai list: a pair of **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* at Chiang Saen Lake, Chiang Rai on 24th February 2002 (HG,PT), an adult **Mew Gull** *Larus canus* photographed at Bang Pu on 10th February 2002 (WS,SSu,ST) and still present the next day (DP,SSe,WS), and three **Chestnut-cheeked Starlings** *Sturnus philippensis* photographed together in a flock containing both **Purple-backed Starling** *S. sturninus* and **White-shouldered Starling** *S. sinensis* at Na Tung, Muang District, Chumphon on 27th October (CN). **Indian Skimmer** *Rynchops albicollis*, reported from Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon on 23rd January 2002 (PRO) was a stunning record of a species not recorded in Thailand for c.35 years. Other rarities during the period under review included five **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* on the Mekong River upstream of Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai on 19th January 2002 (ST), which were first recorded on 10th January 2002 (JC) and still present on 2nd February (DP,KS,KSa,WS), and had increased to six by 2nd March (NT), three more **Ruddy Shelducks** at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Prachuap Khiri Khan on 19th November (NI,EP), a male **Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata* at Chiang

Saen on 2nd February 2002 (DP,KS,KSa,WS,BK), a **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* 5 km south of Tha Ton on 12th January 2002 (EC,PC,YP), two **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta* on a pond behind Phanthai Norasingh School, Khok Kham on 5th February 2002 (PRo *et al.*/Wings) and a single there on 11th March 2002 (SD,WJ,AP,PRo,KW), a single **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* on the Mekong at Chiang Saen on 19th January 2002 (ST), and a **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *Calidris acuminata* at Khok Kham from 1st December (SD,RJ,PRo *et al.*) to 15th December (GD,PS,UT). There were two first-year **Slender-billed Gulls** *Larus genei* at Bang Pu on 12th November (SJ), three there on 17th November (MM), 1st (KK,MM,JP,PRo) and 11th December (ST), a record count of at least ten first winter birds there on 24th February 2002 (PRo), and a single bird at Khok Kham on 14th January (KS,WS) and 5th February (Wings) 2002. Definitive identification of an immature vulture near a Karen Village, Ban Huai Yao, Khuan Yuam District, Mae Hongson (apparently inside Namtok Mae Surin National Park) on 18th December may not be possible, though the observers (PJ,NN) considered it was probably **White-rumped Vulture** *Gyps bengalensis*. Another vulture, identified as an immature **White-rumped**, was seen in flight over Khao Khieo Open Zoo, Chonburi on 12th January 2002 (SKl), after a picture had been posted on the internet. There are no previous records from SE Thailand, but it is not known whether it had escaped from the zoo or not. Still on the rarity theme, a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk was reported from Tha Yang, Chumphon on 18th October (CN), though no details were submitted of this potential first for S Thailand, there were two **Great Crested Grebes** *Podiceps cristatus* at Nong Bong Khai, Chiang Saen, on 24th November (BK), three there on 8th December (JND), and another reported from Mae Ngat Reservoir, Sri Lanna National Park, Chiang Mai on 2nd December (NP), a **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* at Bang Pu, Samut Prakan on 8th February 2002 (VK,WS), which remained for some days and, remarkably, two more reported from Bung Boraphet, Nakhon Sawan on 20th February 2002 (SN,KY), three **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* reported from Nong Bong Khai on 26th October (per ST), a single **Asian Openbill** *Anastomus oscitans* at Kaem Ling Nong Yai, Chumphon on 4th November (CN), a southwards straggler, a single **Greater Adjutant** *Leptoptilos dubius* over an open area near the Phasak Dam, Chaibadan District, Lop Buri, C Thailand on 19th November (STho), the first record for a few years, a male

Silver Oriole *Oriolus mellianus* reported from Fang National Park, Chiang Mai on 8th December (TD), and another (sex unknown) seen at Thinuey Guard Station, Thung Yai, Kanchanaburi on 25th January 2002 (ST). There have been a few **Eurasian Blackbirds** *Turdus merula*, with singles reported from Phu Khieo, Chaiyaphum, NE Thailand on 17th November (ST), Nong Bong Khai on 1st January (DP,KS,SSe,PW)–2nd February (DP,KS,KSa,WS) 2002, and the golf course at Khao Yai NP, on 22nd–23rd January 2002 (ST; though apparently seen by many observers over a much longer period). An adult male **Red-throated Thrush** *T. ruficollis ruficollis* was present on the summit of Doi Inthanon from 2nd–10th February 2002 (CK,LBC). A single **Brahminy Starling** *S. pagodarum* was found just west of Kanchanaburi on 29th January 2002 (WA,HS), and there were three records of **Rosy Starling** *S. roseus*, with an immature between Phetchaburi and Kaeng Krachan on 15th November (PE,ME, KK), an adult male reported from Mae Sarieng, Mae Hongson on 19th January 2002 (PW), the first from NW Thailand, and two juveniles reported from Thinuey Guard Station, Thung Yai on 26th January (ST). A single **Common Starling** *S. vulgaris* was present at Tha Ton, Chiang Mai on 2nd/3rd December (JND), and there was another at Mae Jo, Chiang Mai on 6th December (CB,RKl). A single **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* was found at Doi Ang Khang on 10th February 2002 (PB,PS), the first record for some years. Also of interest were three **Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers** *Dendrocopos hyperythrus* in the Huai Mae Dee-Khao Bandai area, Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Uthai Thani during 8th–10th December (CT,ST), the first from W Thailand, and 10–12 **Blue-rumped Parrots** *Psittinus cyanurus* at Mae Nam Phachi Wildlife Sanctuary, Ratchaburi on 16th September, a slight northwards range extension. There has been a spate of **White-bellied Pigeon** *Treron sieboldii* records, with two or three reported from Doi Phu Kha, Nan during 21st–22nd October (SJ) a female identified at Thinuey Guard Station, Thung Yai on 27th January 2002 (ST), a male at the northern (fire station) viewpoint at Khao Yai on 10th February 2002 (PRo *et al.*/Wings), and unspecified numbers at Sala Phrom Guard Station, Phu Khieo, Chaiyaphum on 18th February 2002 (DP,KS), and Phu Luang, Loei on 25th February 2002 (ST). **Black-tailed Crake** *Porzana bicolor* was discovered along a new route up to Doi Pa Hom Pok (which reaches 2,120 m), during 21st–23rd January 2002 (JP). Route 1314 starts 200 m south of the bridge at Tha Ton, and travels 32 km to the summit of

the mountain, passing through five army checkpoints. A **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris pygmeus* was present with a large concentration of stints at Khao Sam Roi Yot NP on 22nd October (MM,PRo,STh), only one day after another made its first appearance at the usual wintering site of Khok Kham (SD). Records were then received from the latter site right through to 11th March 2002 (SD,WJ, KW), when a single was seen; with the number peaking at four on 5th February 2002 (PRo *et al.*/Wings), the largest count since the species was first found at the site in 1995. Two **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris* were on the Mekong River at Chiang Saen on 24th November (BK), while the Mekong River between Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong produced two **Great Thick-knees** on 6th December (JND), and at least 1,600 **Small Pratincoles** *Glareola lactea* and 18 **River Lapwings** *Vanellus duvaucelii* on 2nd February 2002 (DP,KS,KSa,WS). Six **Crab-plovers** *Dromas ardeola* apparently flew past the raptor watch team at Tha Yang, Chumphon on 13th October (CN), and two **Grey Plovers** *Pluvialis squatarola*, found inland with a flock of Pacific **Golden Plovers** *P. fulva* at Samkhok, Pathumthani District, north of Bangkok on 4th November (PS), were unusual. Amongst the more interesting raptor records were two presumed resident **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes* reported from the Bo Thong Guard Station, Khao Ang Ru Nai on 29th August (DP,WS), a new resident record for SE Thailand, **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* reported nesting at Ko Pratong, Phangnga on 19th January 2002 (WS), a female **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** at Bung Mae Rawing, Sukhothai on 13th December (AP,PRo,SRu,JWi), an immature **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* at Samkhok on 4th November (PS), a first year **Imperial Eagle** *A. heliaca* over the Khao Khieo Viewpoint, Khao Yai on 9th February 2002 (PRo *et al.*/Wings), a single dark morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus* at Khao Sok National Park on 5th February 2002 (WA,HS), and six **Northern Hobbies** *Falco subbuteo* which flew past the Khun Mae Ya Watershed Station, Mae Hongson on 14th October (DP,WS), confirming that the species is a passage migrant in Thailand. Good records of large waterbirds included two **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo* on 26th–27th November (BK) and a single **Darter** *Anhinga melanogaster* on 10th November (CK,LBC *et al.*), at the Mae Ngat Dam, Sri Lanna National Park, Chiang Mai, two **Purple Herons** *Ardea purpurea* carrying nest material at Bang Kaew, Km 8, Bang Na-Trat Highway, SE Thailand on 9th March 2002, indicating probable nesting in the area (ST), five **Black-headed Ibises**

Threskiornis melanocephalus at Ban Bang Kang, Ban Laem District, Phetchaburi on 18th November (BKh), and plenty of **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala*, with at least 40 on prawn ponds at Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem District, on 2nd September (PRo,SRo,STh), up to 69 nearer Ban Laem town on 12th September (BF), four on nearby saltpans between Laem Phak Bia and Bang Kaew on 4th November (MM,AP,PRo), ten at Ban Khao Takhrao, Ban Laem District on 17th November, which had increased to 24 at nearby Ban Bang Kang on 24th November (BKh), and three at Khok Kham on 14th January 2002 (KS,WS). A female **Blue-fronted Robin** *Myiomela frontale* was netted, and a **Grey-bellied Tesia** *Tesia cyaniventer* seen, on Doi Wao, Nanthaburi National Park, Nan on 19th December (AP,PRo,SRu,JWi). A *tonkinensis* race **Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch** *Sitta castanea* was reported from the Ban Arunothai Road, on the lower slopes of Doi Ang Khang (700 m elevation) on 25th September (ST); it was formerly only documented to occur on Doi Hua Mot. Four or five **Brown Prinias** *Prinia polychroa*, reported from Mimosa scrub at Huai Thungtao, Chiang Mai on 27th January 2002 (AB), were the first to be recorded from the Chiang Mai plain. There was a **Manchurian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus (agricola) tangorum* at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Bangkhunthien Campus, Bangkok on 16th January 2002 (AP), and a **Chinese Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus sichuanensis*, seen well on Khao Phanoen Thung, Kaeng Krachan on 29th January 2002 (PRo *et al.*/KingBird), was the first from W Thailand. Also of note were a pair of **Black-eared Shrike Babblers** *Pteruthius melanotis* at the Khun Mae Ya Watershed Station, Mae Hongson on 14th October (DP,WS), and **Scarlet Finches** *Haematospiza sipahi*, with three females on Doi Pha Hom Pok on 30th December (SSe,KS,PW) and seven or eight others (including three males), elsewhere in Tha Ton District, Chiang Mai on 31st December (DP). There have been some very interesting high counts of various species: 75 **Plain-pouched Hornbills** *Aceros subruficollis* were counted flying past the Khlong Hala Sub Station, Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary on 17th August (WS), and an astounding flock of 50 **White-throated Needletails** *Hirundapus caudacutus*, apparently moving ahead of a rain-front, was seen at Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, Chanthaburi on 27th August (AN). The largest count of **Pale-capped Pigeons** *Columba punicea* in mangroves at Ban Bang Charoen, Tha Yang District, Chumphon, was 126 emerging from the roost on 2nd January 2002 (CN). No fewer than 38 **Large Green Pigeons**

Treron capellei were seen near Khlong Hala, Hala-Bala WS on 17th August (WS). High tide at Laem Phak Bia produced a high mid-winter count of 340 **Great Knots** *Calidris tenuirostris* on 30th January 2002 (KingBird), while other good wader totals included a roost of 1,200 **Little Ringed Plovers** *Charadrius dubius* on the runway of Sukhothai Airport on 11th December (AP,PRo,SRu), at least 74 **Common Sandpipers** *Actitis hypoleucos* gathering on a sandbar at Ao Yang, Ta Mai, Chanthaburi on 19th August (AN), and 120 **Broad-billed Sandpipers** *Limicola falcinellus* at Khao Sam Roi Yot NP on 22nd October (MM,STh *et al.*). An estimated 8,000 raptors (three **Ospreys** *Pandion haliaetus*, **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans*, both Chinese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter soloensis* and **Japanese Sparrowhawk** *A. gularis*) were reported on migration by a team of observers at Tha Yang, Chumphon during 13th–14th October (CN). In all, it was thought that roughly 50,000 raptors passed through during the period 28th September–31st October, though no details were received of the species involved. Over 100 harriers, mainly or all **Eastern Marsh Harriers** *Circus spilonotus* were seen entering a roost in reedbeds at Nong Chorakhe, Sukhothai on 14th December (AP,PRo,SRu,JWi). A mixed flock of over 1,000 frigatebirds, including both **Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel* and **Christmas Island Frigatebird** *F. andrewsi* was seen over the Bida Islets, Ko Phi Phi, Krabi on 20th December (NI,EP,VS *et al.*). A count of 12 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* was made at Ko Pratong, Phang-nga, possibly Thailand's last remaining breeding site, on 19th January 2002 (WS). An estimated 1,000 **White-shouldered Starlings** roosted in mangrove scrub at Laem Phak Bia, on 2nd March 2002 (PRo,SRo), and no fewer than 100 **Spot-winged Starlings** *Saroglossa spiloptera* were seen at Thinuey Guard Station, Thung Yai during 25th–27th January 2002 (ST). Also of note were c.1,000 **Sand Martins** *Riparia riparia* flying over the reedbed to an undetermined roost site, at Nong Chorakhe on 14th December (AP,PRo,SRu,JWi), and 150 **Asian House Martins** *Delichon dasypus* roosting in an isolated 15 m tall leafy tree at Khun Mae Ya, Mae Hongson on 14th October (DP,WS). Unseasonal records included a **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clauator coromandus* on the KU Kamphaengsaen Campus, Nakhon Pathom on 6th January 2002, a **Grey-tailed Tattler** *Heteroscelus brevipes* at Krabi on 13th February 2002 (HvdJ,LS), six **Asian Dowitchers** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Laem Phak Bia on 1st February 2002 (SD), and 43 **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* at the marsh by Sukhothai

Airport on 13th December (AP,PRo,SRu,JWi). Sightings of a single **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectans* at Doi Khun Khoon, Mae Jarim NP, Nan on 21st December (ST), and three more reported from Huai Nam Lu (1,500 m elevation), Doi Sam Muen, watershed between Chiang Mai and Mae Hongson provinces, north of the road from Mae Malai (south of Mae Taeng) to Pai and Mae Hongson town, on 30th December (ST), add further credence to the theory that there are isolated resident populations in NW Thailand. An extraordinarily early **Red-throated Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* was reported from Mae Wong, Kamphaengphet on 27th August (ST), and there was a **Blue-and-white Flycatcher** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* in a north Bangkok garden on 18th and 19th December (BM). New elevation records were **Spotted Fantail** *Rhipidura perlata* and a pair of **Maroon-breasted Philentomas** *Philentoma velatum* at 1,060 m in the Hala Sector, Hala-Bala WS in mid August (WS), and a male **Dark-breasted Rosefinch** *Carpodacus nivalensis* at an unusually low elevation (c.500 m?) at Mae Fang National Park on 9th February 2002 (DP,KS), also the first record for several years. The following breeding records extended known breeding seasons in the region: nest-building **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* at Phu Luang on 23rd February 2002, a pair of **Great Slaty Woodpeckers** *Mulleripicus pulverulentus* with a small recently-fledged juvenile at Huai Mae Dee, Huai Kha Khaeng on 10th September (ST), **Hairy-backed Bulbul** *Tricholestes crinitiger*, **Grey-headed Babbler** *Stachyris poliocephala*, **Chestnut-rumped Babbler** *S. maculata*, **Chestnut-winged Babbler** *S. erythroptera*, and **Spectacled Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera flavigaster* all seen feeding fledged young at Bala, Hala-Bala WS during 27th September to 3rd October (ST), two pairs of **Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers** *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys* nest-building at Doi Ang Khang on 19th February 2002 (ST), and **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush** *Garrulax mitratus* feeding two fledged young on the summit of Doi Inthanon on 2nd November (ST). A flock of 20 **Eurasian Thick-knees** *Burhinus oedicephalus* at Prong Salord Reservoir, Phetchaburi on 4th November (BKhu,KSu,NS,AW,RW *et al.*) apparently included some full-grown young. Finally, another **Darter** breeding site has been discovered, in Nakhon Nayok Province, C or NE Thailand, where 13 birds and two nests were observed on 30th September (PP).

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A diary of the anxious times of Operation Swift

The following text includes extracts from the diary of Dr Satish A. Pande and chronicles the events surrounding his team's discovery and foiling of a swiftlet nest smuggling operation while undertaking research on terns and swiftlets in the Vengurla Rocks area, offshore western India – Eds

April 7, 2001: We reached the fishing hamlet of Niwati Medha which lies between Malwan and Vengurla, by bus. Our final destination was Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks, (16°35'–45'N, 73°27'–30'W), seven nautical miles offshore. We made arrangements for our ferry, supplies and accommodation etc. and then spent the remaining day photographing swallow-shrikes on the Vayangani coast, about forty kilometres from Niwati, in south Kokan.

April 8: At 05h45 we stepped into the fibre-body motor driven ferry and set sail for the Vengurla Rocks with the intention of obtaining data on the current status of the terns and Edible-nest Swiftlets *Collocalia unicolor* there for publication in our forthcoming book – '*The Birds of Kokan and the Western Ghats*'. After an hour and ten minutes at sea we alighted on the farthest island near the old lighthouse. The going was very difficult and dangerous too. In the interior chamber of the crumbling but majestic structure that was the old lighthouse we saw thirty or so swiftlet nests but very little other birdlife.

We ferried on to the easternmost, squarish island, Burnt Island or Bandra as it is known locally, the site of the caves where swiftlets and various tern spp. have been nesting. The Ratnagiri Gazetteer and later the writings of Humayun Abdulali have described these swiftlets and their saliva nests, famous in the Far East for their culinary value. Again, the landing on this island was no less perilous an adventure. We unloaded our backpacks, water cans and sent back the ferry with a request to collect us at 18h30 the same day. Thousands of swiftlets filled the sky above the island. Whilst observing them we noticed that they were occasionally disappearing, apparently into the ground in front of us. Upon investigation we found the cause of this illusion to be a 'skylight' to a large cave that was sprawling under our feet. We eagerly peered into the hole and were

shocked. The cave which we expected to be empty was in fact occupied by a gigantic framework of bamboo. This unexpected finding confirmed our worst fears: a clandestine trade in swiftlet nests was very much in operation. To investigate further, Vishwas climbed down a fifty-foot vertical cliff that led to the entrance of the cave at sea-level. Meanwhile the rest of the party scoured the surroundings and discovered the island to be littered with broken blue-blotched egg shells and dead terns, some with black wings and others with yellow beaks, indicating that terns were still nesting here. Sometime later we returned to the 'skylight' and lowered our equipment through the hole by rope to Vishwas, who by that time had reached the cave floor.

Ram bravely tried to scale the vertical cliff but it was proving difficult and risky, and at my behest he unwillingly abandoned the attempt. After much deliberation I swam around the island to the cave entrance, negotiating goose barnacle studded and sea-urchin infested razor-sharp rocks, liberally cutting my hands and feet in the process. Thousands of swiftlets were nesting in the dark recesses of the cave and were audibly navigating by echolocation. Pigeons and small bats were also present and guano-eating cockroaches were abundant. The most plentiful things however was bamboo! You could not see the floor for it and fresh bamboo indicated that the poaching was ongoing. It was neatly tied to form enormous frames reaching the cave roof about fifteen metres from the ground. Unsurprisingly the cave was filled with the pungent odour of bird excrement which formed a thick crust on both the floor and on the bamboo frames. The lowest nest was three and a half feet from the ground and the highest was on the roof. The nest density reached forty nests per square metre in places, giving us a conservative estimate of at least three thousand nests in the cave. The nests were pearly-white, shiny, sticky and gelatinous — spongy to the touch. All the nests appeared to active and the birds were freely entering the cave, occasionally dashing against our bodies.

The nests were infested with tiny maggots, bugs and guano-eating cockroaches and their construction was almost complete, with eggs expected in a few days. They were attached to the

wall bracket-wise, their free edges reinforced with straw. After completing our study we headed back to Niwati-Medha at 19h45 in the launch which had thankfully returned to collect us. We introduced ourselves to the citizens of this village, old and young alike and played them a video recording we had made of the cave, showing the large maze of bamboo scaffolding. When asked by whom and for what purpose this was erected they promptly replied that it was the work of biannual visitors from south India who came to collect pigeon droppings for medicinal purposes. They came in April and September, before and after the monsoons. *This was alarming.* When asked as to why a tall bamboo frame was required to collect guano from the ground, they knew that they had had the wool pulled over their eyes. They were not aware of the swiftlets and their valuable saliva nests. We spent an hour explaining to them about the Wildlife Protection Act and they were shocked to learn about the trade of the nests for culinary and aphrodisiac purposes in the Far East. *This one hour that we spent on nature education was to pay us dividends later.*

April 10: (Henceforth the narrative is in the first person of Satish Pande) I reached Pune and immediately acquired the addresses of the forest authorities and since the trade was likely to be going overseas, that of the Deputy Regional Director WR, Mumbai too. I immediately dispatched letters detailing our observations and strongly requesting the immediate removal of the bamboo frames from the cave and the placing of an iron grid on the entrance and over the two 'skylights'. The poachers were expected any time now and the three thousand nests were in imminent danger. Clearly, this was an urgent matter.

April 11: I suddenly panicked. The thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of April were public holidays and the letters would not arrive in time. The removal of the bamboo would have to be done at a rapid pace. I e-mailed these people but to no avail. I then e-mailed my friends and asked for their help in forwarding an urgent message to all concerned. Fortunately Mr Ulhas Rane forwarded the alert to the all-India birdwatchers egroup – *Pakshimitra* and that night I managed to contact CF Kolhapur at the Forestry Department by phone. There was also the question of the coastguard who may also come in the picture. No-one seemed to be available due to the holidays. Being a medical doctor, this holiday business was very frustrating as we doctors have no holidays –

life is foremost. *But three thousand nests were at stake.* How could holidays matter? But sadly they did.

April 12: I obtained the phone number of DCF Sawantwadi (the Rocks were under his direct jurisdiction) from CF Kolhapur and contacted him. He too was taken by surprise but on his request I sent him a detailed E-mail. He understood the gravity of the situation and promised to look into the matter but said the earliest would still only be Monday.

April 14: All our E-mail birdwatcher contacts had lodged reports with the relevant organisations and we discussed the importance of generating public awareness through the media.

April 15: The news was released to the Marathi newspaper, '*Sakal*' and it was carried in all the editions in Maharashtra. On the advice of Mr Prakash Gole, Vice Adm.(Retd) MP Awati was also approached if the need for help from the coastguards should arise. He whole heartedly assured his help.

April 16: In the evening, I talked to CF Kolhapur and learnt that the forest guards still hadn't started out. This was discouraging news. On reaching home the phone rang and a fisherman from the Niwati village told me that he had read the '*Sakal*' newspaper and wanted to help. He said that ten or so poachers had landed on the Rocks that very afternoon and had unloaded fresh bamboo. This in my opinion was the most crucial part of the entire episode. The fisherman was one of the crowd who had seen the film that we had shown and he had spontaneously offered his help! This shows the importance of generating awareness of nature and conservation; the one hour spent with the villagers had been priceless.

I immediately contacted DCF Sawantwadi. He was still in the office at 21h00. That itself was comforting. He said that he would dispatch two men to the Rocks the following day. I felt concerned not only about the nests but also about the guards. I told him about the arrival of the poachers as they could well be armed. A bigger and better-equipped party should be sent and I informed DCF Mr Gupta of this too. He thanked me for the news and promised to take due action. I also phoned Vice Adm. Awati about the arrival of the poachers to enlist support from the coastguards.

April 17: At 08h00 I got a phone call from the Vice Adm. and then one from the coastguards office in Mumbai assuring help and that a 'chopper' would be sent to the Rocks and if necessary a ship too! This was a relief. I phoned Sawantwadi and learnt that a team of fifteen had left for the Rocks at 06h00. The day passed slowly. That evening Vishwas Katdare phoned to say that he had confirmed news that five people were caught red-handed in possession of six bags of swiftlet nests. A lot of nests were still intact however. A local person from the fishing hamlet of Kochra was also involved and duly arrested.

April 18: I phoned Mr. Gupta and congratulated him on the great work, open-mindedness and cooperation and asked him to forgive me for any unpleasant verbal exchanges which may have taken place out of sheer anxiety to save the nests.

Actions still remaining:

The bamboos have not yet been removed from the cave and the iron grids are yet to be placed over the entrance and on the two 'skylights'. This alone would be a permanent deterrence to the poachers. The forest department and the

coastguards should include the cave in their regular patrolling schedule and a nature awareness campaign should be run in the fishing hamlets.

The Bombay Natural History Society and the forestry departments are requested to cooperate with us in carrying out studies into the ecology of the swiftlets such as bird ringing, investigating the successive use of nests and the accuracy of echolocation, etc.

The Vengurla Rocks are important not only to the swifts but also to several marine terns and ocean birds and as such should be given special status as a protected area. The problem of the swift family not featuring in any of the wildlife protection schedules should now be thrashed out and the lacunae filled.

Dr. Satish A. Pande (President Ila Foundation—devoted to nature conservation and awareness), Vishwas Katdare and Ram Mone (Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra—society devoted to nature conservation)

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Stray Feathers



Kukila marches on!

The preparation of Volume 12 of Kukila is nearly complete. This volume will feature two major articles on Important Bird Areas of Sumatra and Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo). It will be a special memorial issue commemorating the achievements of the late Derek Holmes, the Chief Editor of Kukila for its first 15 years. If you have an interest in birds of this megadiverse region (with 1,500-odd bird species!) you really should subscribe to Kukila. You can find out about subscriptions and past issues from our website: <http://www.zoo.nsw.gov.au/kukila/>

OSJ launches new journal

In January 2002, the Ornithological Society of Japan (OSJ) launched a new English journal, *Ornithological Science*. The journal will appear twice a year (in January and July) and will primarily publish articles submitted by ornithologists working in East and South-East Asia but submissions from elsewhere are welcome. Manuscripts will be critically appraised by two independent referees and the editor. The corresponding author receives thirty free offprints. Membership of OSJ is open to anyone interested in ornithology and the aims of the OSJ and members already

receive two issues per year of *Japanese Journal of Ornithology* (with English abstract).

Contact: The OSJ Office, c/o Laboratory of Biodiversity Science, School of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Tokyo, Yayoi 1-1-1, Tokyo 113-8657, Japan. Phone: +81-3-5841-7541, Fax: +81-3-5841-8192, E-mail: osj@lagopus.com.

Articles may be submitted to Dr. Teruaki Hino, Associate Editor, Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, Kyoto 612-0855, Japan. Phone: +81-75-611-1201, Fax: +81-75-611-1207.

THE ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB BULLETIN provides a forum for news, notices, recent publications, expedition results, reviews and preliminary or interim publication of studies on Oriental birds by contributors from all parts of the world. Publication of interim results in the OBC Bulletin does not preclude publication of final results as journal papers either by the OBC or elsewhere. Contributions are considered by the Editor and an Editorial Committee with contributions accepted subject to editing and refereeing where appropriate. Copies of new journals, books or reports for mention or reviewing are always welcomed. Contributions or enquiries should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK or email to <mail@orientalbirdclub.org>.

Guidelines for contributors

Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.
3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 28th February (June Bulletin) and 31st August (December Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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